MARVEL MASTERWORKS®
THE FANTASTIC FOUR®
VOLUME 21

THE FANTASTIC FOUR Nos. 232-240,
ANNUAL No. 16 & FANTASTIC FOUR ROAST No. 1
JOHN BYRNE

MARVEL

MARVEL MASTERWORKS

PRESENTS

THE Fantastic Four

VOLUME 21

COLLECTING

THE FANTASTIC FOUR Nos. 232-240,
ANNUAL No. 16 & FANTASTIC FOUR ROAST No. 1

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NOS. 232-240, ANNUAL NO. 16 & FANTASTIC FOUR ROAST NO. 1

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BAXTER BUILDING MEMORIES
BY JOHN BYRNE

First, a little bit of oddness.

The last issue of *Fantastic Four* I bought as a fan, back when I was in my early teens, was #32. Years later, when I returned to the fold, the first issue I bought happened to be #132. Years after that, when I was assigned as full-time writer and artist on the book, my first issue was #232.

Superstitions have been built on less!!!

But my adventures with the Fantastic Four go back beyond #32. The first issue I bought was #5, the one that introduced us to Doctor Doom. A smaller Doom, not yet the major threat he would quickly become. But he had a very cool look, and it was a time-travel story. (I happen to be a sucker for time-travel stories.) Plus, the combination of Jack Kirby and Joe Sinnott made for art like nothing I had ever seen. Do I have to say it? I was hooked!

Unfortunately, for some reason, I'd never quite figured out when new comics hit the stands. I'd wander into the drugstore (or the grocery store or the newsstand or even the bus station—comics were sold in a lot of places in those days) and there would be new issues. But not knowing the days meant I often had to search through several venues to find all the books I collected. Lots of bike riding!

I was of a generation whose parents still thought comics were the Devil's Own. Although my mother tolerated me buying a few titles, I couldn't buy as many as I wanted, and it became a real nightmare when Marvel started to take off. I actually had to give up some of the DC comics I bought. ("DC Superman," as we called them back then.) But the trade was worth it. Slowly, I added *The Avengers* and *The Amazing Spider-Man* and *The Incredible Hulk* (canceled one issue after I started buying!) and *The X-Men* (not yet *Uncanny*) and even *Sgt. Fury and His Howling Commandos*. I had to content myself with seeing the likes of Thor, Iron Man and others in *The Avengers* because of my mother's limits.

Eventually, though, there came an Ending. And it was the Fantastic Four who caused it. Mom had been pressuring me to stop buying comics, as I drifted deeper and deeper into my teens. "Too old!" she said. I hung on, though, until *FF* #32. That one had a "mystery villain." And I guessed who it was by page three. Hmm. Maybe Mom was right! Maybe I had been reading too long.

So I stopped, pretty much cold turkey. I walked away, and it would be five or six years before I came back. And it was the Fantastic Four that brought me back.

In Art College, as a First Year project, I did a comic book (heavily influenced by the British *Eagle* comics I'd read for years), and this was seen by a fan in Calgary where I lived. He offered to hook me up with various amateur fanzines, which were only too happy to publish my sketches. Then, one asked for a drawing of the FF versus Galactus for their cover. Galactus would become one of my favorite characters, but at that moment in time I had no idea who or what he was. So I went to the drugstore and picked up the latest issue, #132, hoping Galactus might be in it. He wasn't, but not long after I wandered into a local secondhand bookstore just one day after a local fan had liquidated his entire collection. For 5¢ an issue (!!) I was able to catch up on the FF, Spider-Man, the Avengers, the X-Men… For some insane reason I didn't pick up the back issues of *Thor*, *Iron Man* and *Daredevil* that were there!

So, I lugged all these boxes home (on the bus!!) and spent a weekend reading those FF issues.

(Coincidentally, the first one in the collection was #32!) Word of caution: Don't spend the better part of 48 hours immersed in Kirby comics! The real world looked as if he had drawn it for several days thereafter!

Anyway, I was back. I did the Galactus drawing, and plenty more, and some of this caught the eye of Nic Cuti, at Charlton Comics. He gave me regular work. Meanwhile, Tony Isabella was trying to do the same at Marvel, though that took years.

Finally, I was offered Iron Fist, about to be spun into his own title from *Marvel Premiere*. This was the first time I was teamed up with Chris Claremont. We did more stuff later.

I was on my way, but somehow I never thought I would get to be The Man on *Fantastic Four*. I did a few issues with another writer during my *X-Men* days, but since they were needed only as very loose "breakdowns" for Joe Sinnott to ink, they were not entirely satisfying. It would be another few years before I would be able to find my "voice" on the book.

And barely a whisper that voice was, at first. You wanna talk intimidation? Sure, I was coming off a "cult favorite," a book that was the big buzz in fandom, but this was the Fantastic Four! I could still feel the impact reading that first issue, issue #5, had on me. Now, those characters were "mine"!

I overreacted. I resolved to turn the book back, as much as I could, to what it had been when I started reading it. Johnny Storm shed about a decade in age. Ben Grimm got grumpier. And Reed Richards became positively emaciated! Only Sue survived more or less unscathed—though I did give her a ghastly new hairdo! Perhaps in unconscious compensation for that, I started expanding her use of her powers.

Poor Sue was still mostly a liability in those days, the one the bad guys captured. But she had once used her invisible force field to knock out the Hulk, and I took every opportunity to remind people of that.

So, after about a year on the book, I began to settle into more familiar rhythms. I was not so nervous anymore, and I began to let the characters tell me what to do, instead of trying to steer them. (If you're not a writer, that statement probably seems ridiculous. These are, after all, fictional characters. "Lines on paper." But when the mojo was really humming, it truly did feel as if I was reporting more than I was inventing.)

I journeyed through Fantastic Four mythology, visiting old favorites, seeking new twists and turns for them, and even for the main players. But all the while, I tried to keep at the front of my mind what Lee and Kirby had done. Some writers will approach an established title saying, "Everything you know is a lie!" I said, "Things are not always as they seem." Subtle difference, sure, but important.

In the end, I lasted almost six years with the FF—quite a long run in those days—and great praise was heaped upon me. Deservedly so? Well, now you have the chance to judge for yourselves. Some of you will no doubt have read these stories before, so your opinions, for good or ill, will already be formed. But some of you may be new to these pages, and you will be able to decide for yourself how that kid who bought *Fantastic Four* #5 made out!

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Fantastic Four®

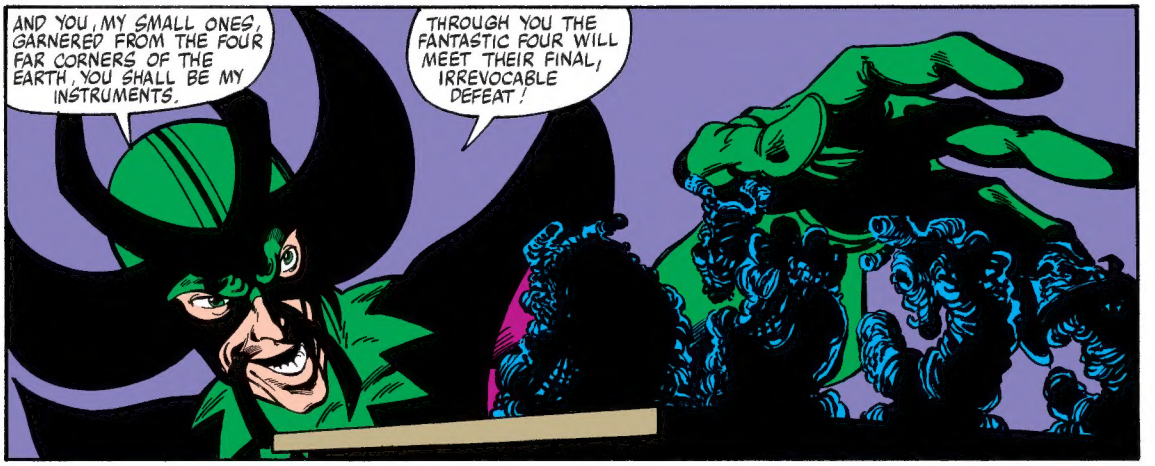
Reed Richards! Ben Grimm! Sue Richards! Johnny Storm! Together they braved the unknown terrors of outer space and were changed into something more than human! MR. FANTASTIC! THE THING! THE INVISIBLE GIRL! THE HUMAN TORCH! And now the world will never again be the same!

Stan Lee PRESENTS: THE FANTASTIC FOUR!®

JOHN BYRNE WORDS & PICTURES / BJORN HEYN INKS / JIM NOVAK LETTERS / GLYNIS WEIN COLORS / JIM SALICRUP EDITOR / JIM SHOOTER EDITOR-IN-CHIEF

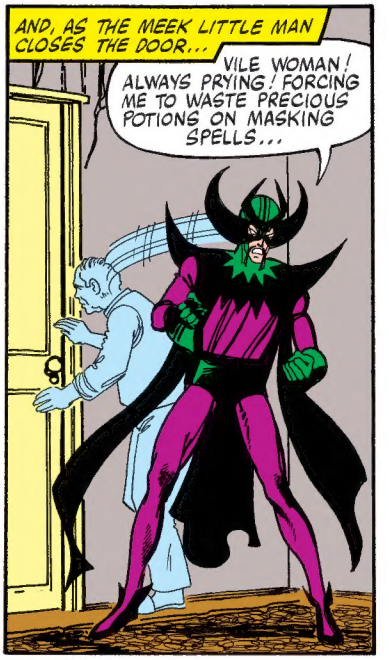
BACK TO THE BASICS!

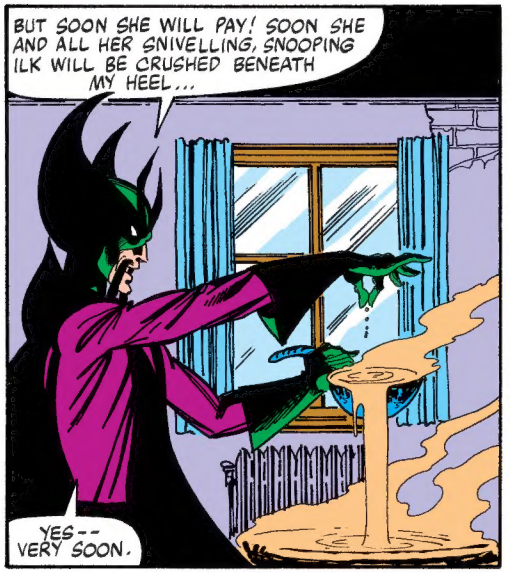
THE FANTASTIC FOUR -- MY OLD AND MUCH VAUNTED FOES -- SHALL SOON LEARN WHO IS TRULY MOST POWERFUL!
SOON I SHALL DESTROY THEM AS EASILY AS I HAVE CONJURED THEIR IMAGES.
THE ARCANE POTIONS FILL THE AIR WITH THEIR NOXIOUS FUMES, AND CANDLE LIGHT GLIMMERS IN EYES NOT A LITTLE MAD.
HE IS CALLED DIABLO, AND HE IS MASTER OF THE ARTS ALCHEMICAL.

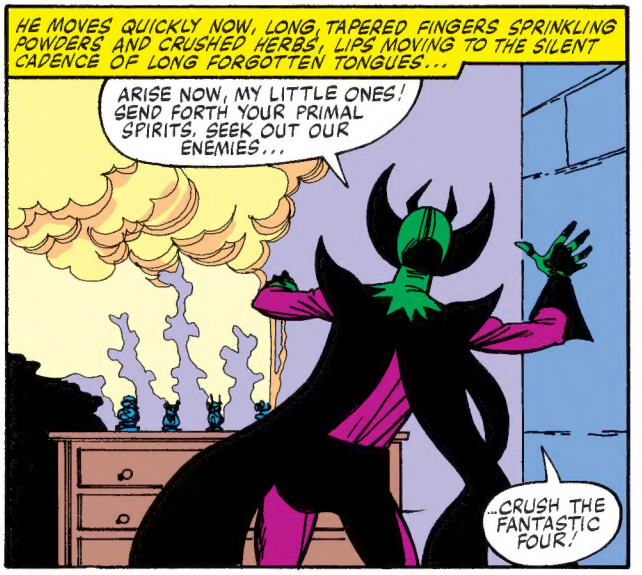

AND YOU, MY SMALL ONES, GARNERED FROM THE FOUR FAR CORNERS OF THE EARTH, YOU SHALL BE MY INSTRUMENTS.
THROUGH YOU THE FANTASTIC FOUR WILL MEET THEIR FINAL, IRREVOCABLE DEFEAT!

BUT EVEN AS DIABLO CACKLES AT HIS ANTICIPATED VICTORY...
MR. OLBAID! MR. OLBAID, YOU OPEN THIS DOOR!

UH -- YES, MRS. MULLIGAN? IS THERE SOME PROBLEM?
WHAT ARE THOSE HORRIBLE SMELLS? ARE YOU COOKING IN YOUR ROOM, MR. OLBAID?
OH, NO, MRS. MULLIGAN! I WOULDN'T THINK OF SUCH A THING!
WELL... YOU SEE THAT YOU DON'T!

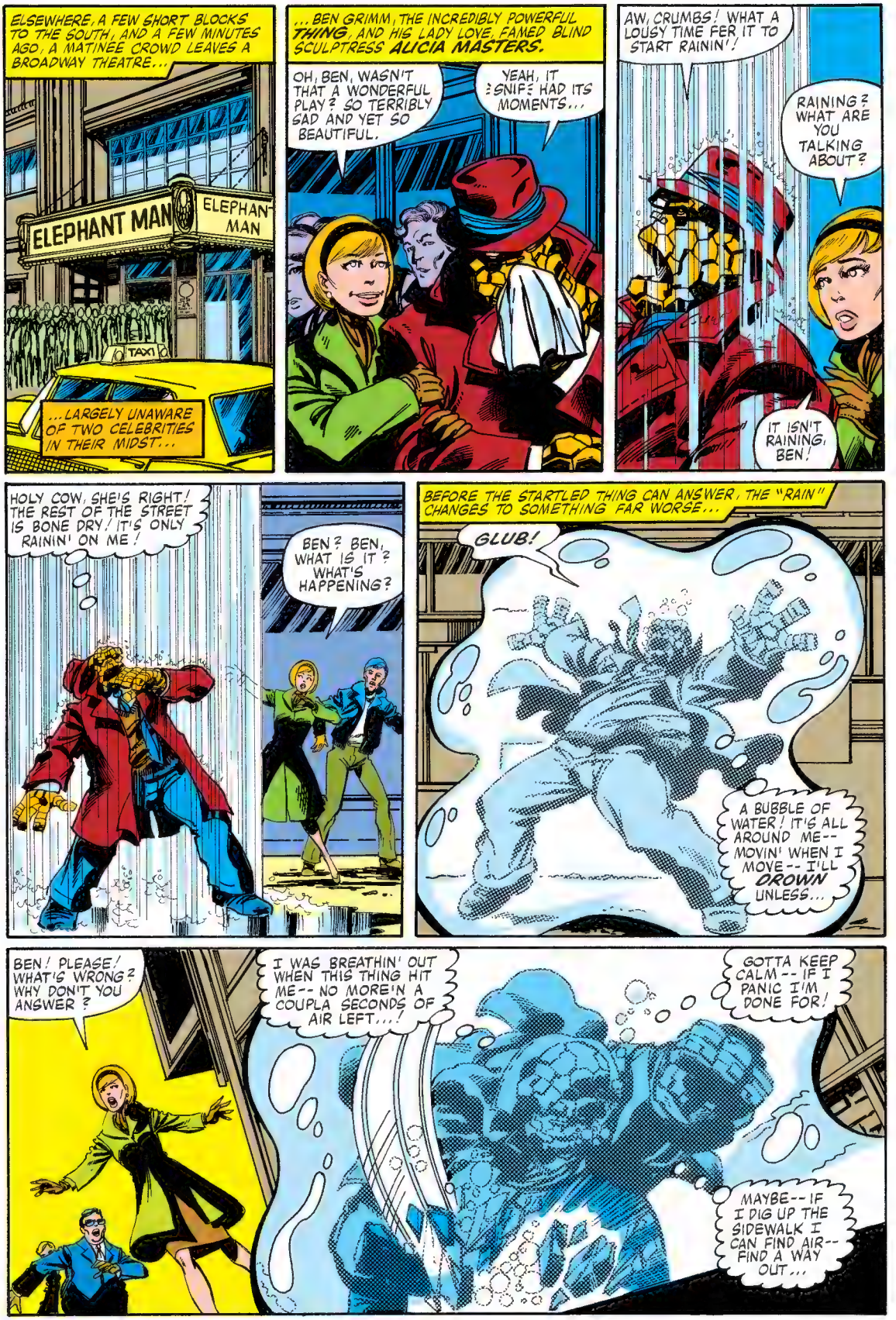

AND, AS THE MEEK LITTLE MAN CLOSES THE DOOR...
VILE WOMAN! ALWAYS PRYING! FORCING ME TO WASTE PRECIOUS POTIONS ON MASKING SPELLS...

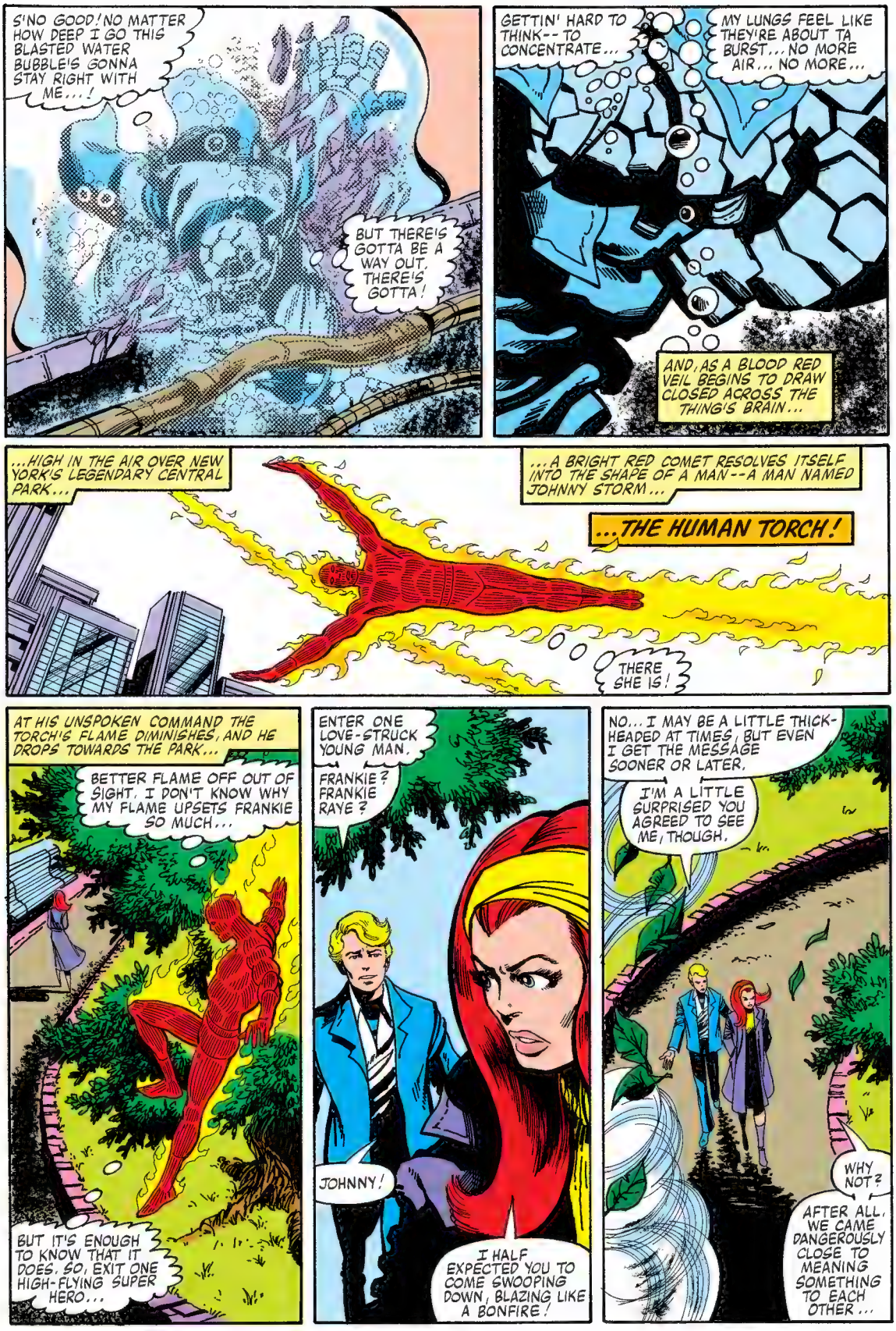

BUT SOON SHE WILL PAY! SOON SHE AND ALL HER SNIVELLING, SNOOPING ILK WILL BE CRUSHED BENEATH MY HEEL...
YES -- VERY SOON.

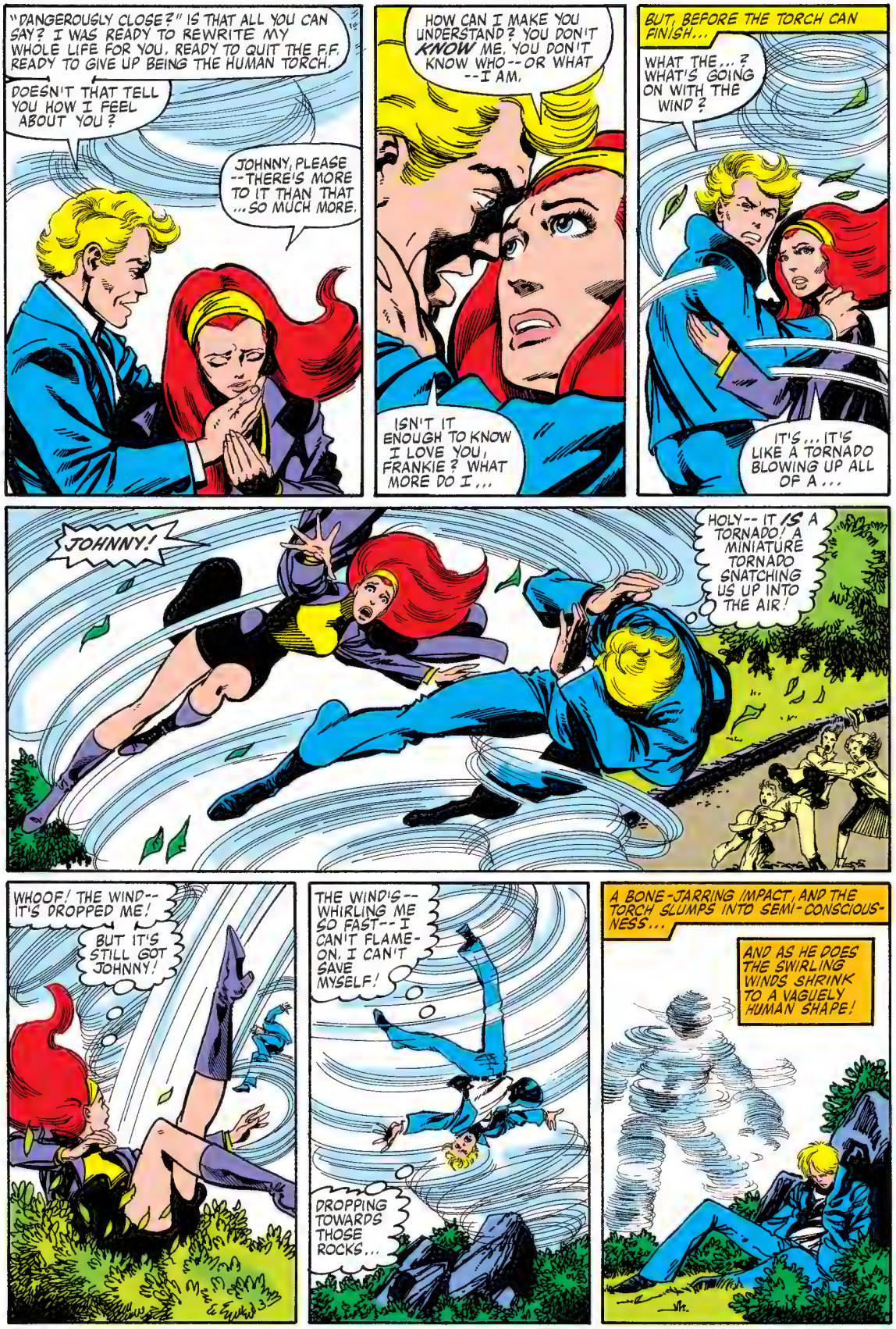

HE MOVES QUICKLY NOW, LONG, TAPERED FINGERS SPRINKLING POWDERS AND CRUSHED HERBS, LIPS MOVING TO THE SILENT CADENCE OF LONG FORGOTTEN TONGUES...
ARISE NOW, MY LITTLE ONES! SEND FORTH YOUR PRIMAL SPIRITS, SEEK OUT OUR ENEMIES...
...CRUSH THE FANTASTIC FOUR!

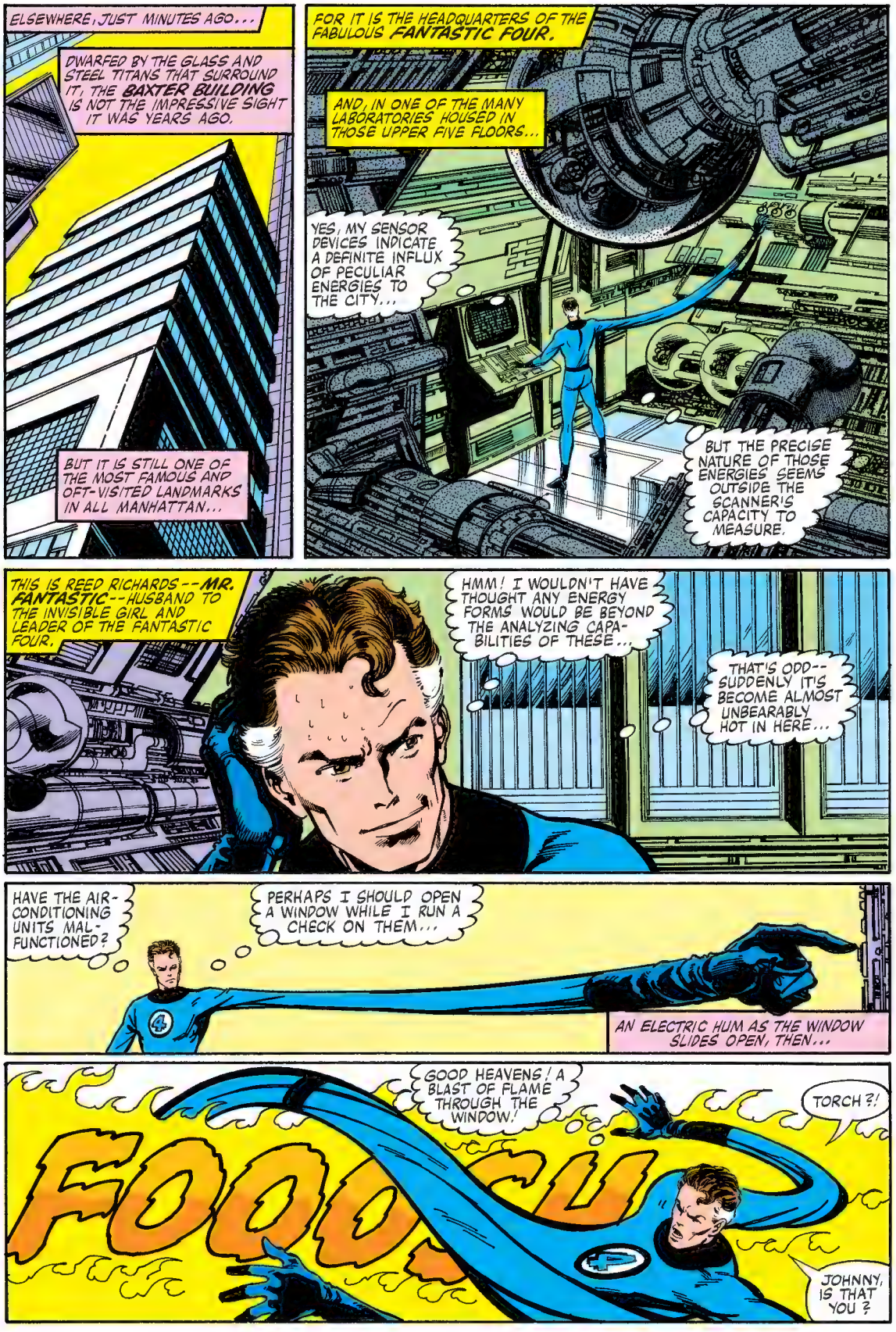
AND ON THAT OMINOUS NOTE, WE TURN OUR GAZE NORTHWARDS, TO ONE OF MANHATTAN'S MOST EXCLUSIVE BEAUTY SALONS...
Casa Tindolini
AND ONE OF ITS MOST FAMOUS CLIENTS, SUSAN STORM RICHARDS; THE INVISIBLE GIRL...
SUZIE, BABY, THIS NEW CUT IS GONNA MAKE YOU LOOK TWENTY YEARS YOUNGER!
WONDERFUL, MILO, I'M SURE MY HUSBAND WILL LOVE BEING MARRIED TO A CHILD!
OOH, AREN'T WE JUST TOO CUTTING TODAY! HERE, LET ME COMB IT OUT AND YOU'LL SEE FOR YOURSELF!
ISN'T THE VERONICA LAKE LOOK A TRIFLE PASSÉ, MILO?
JUST THEN...
OH, MISTER TINDOLINI, LOOK! SOMETHING'S HAPPENING TO THE CONSTRUCTION SITE OUT ON THE STREET!
WEIRD! WHAT COULD MAKE ALL THOSE ROCKS AND DIRT FLY INTO THE AIR LIKE THAT?
dolin
WHAT INDEED...
HEAR ME, HUMANS!
I AM COME FOR SHE WHO IS THE INVISIBLE GIRL!
WOE BETIDE THOSE WHO STAND IN MY WAY!

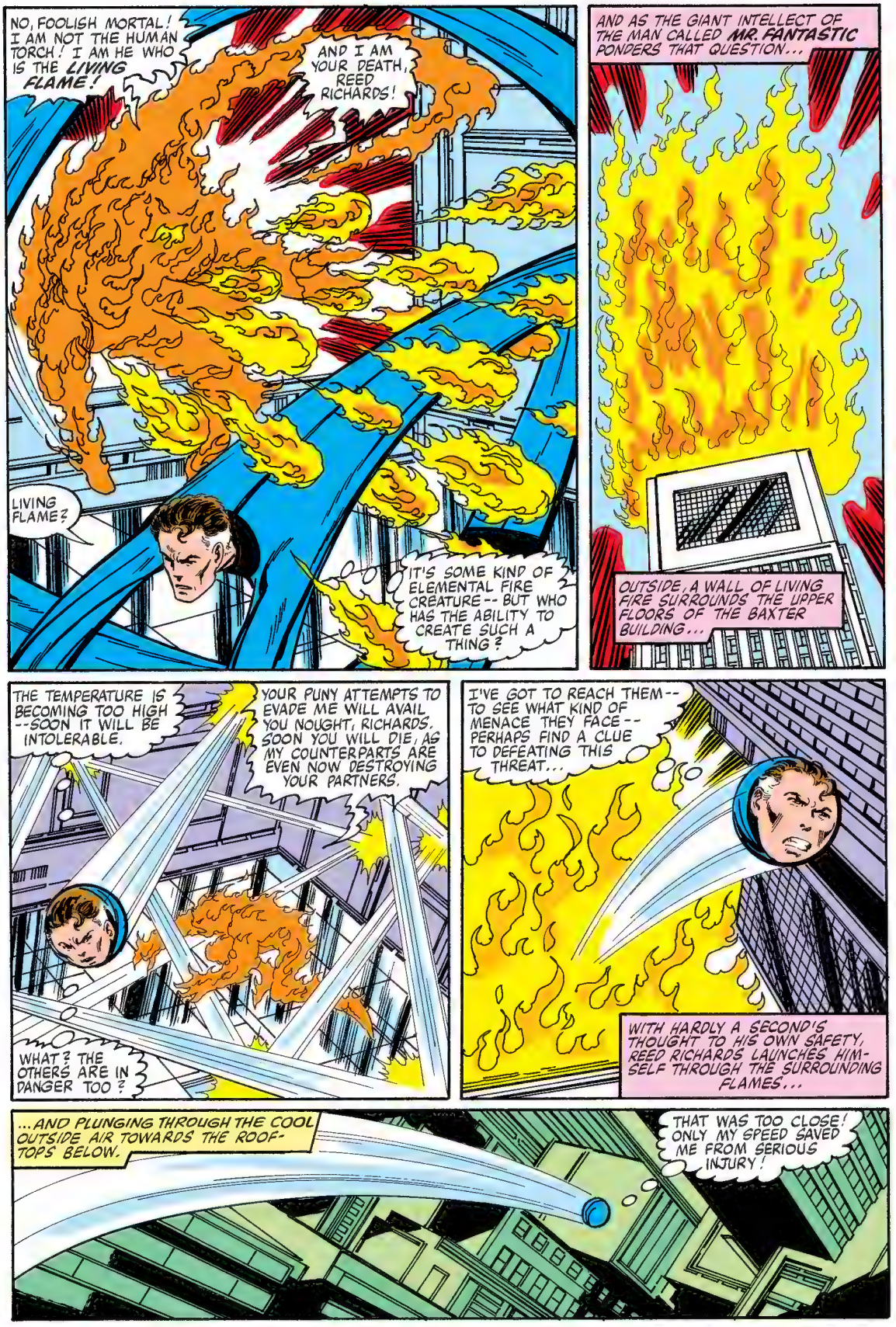
THAT THING IS AFTER ME?! MILO, THIS MAY BE MORE THAN I CAN HANDLE ON MY OWN. WILL YOU CALL MY...
SORRY, SUZIE! YOU HEARD WHAT THAT THING SAID! YOU'RE ON YOUR OWN!
WELL, THANK YOU MR. TINDOLINI! GOOD THING REED SUGGESTED I PRACTICE CONTROL OF MY INVISIBILITY POWERS...
BY KEEPING MY UNIFORM INVISIBLE UNDER MY STREET CLOTHES, NOW I CAN SHED MY OUTER GARMENTS WITHOUT MAKING THE FRONT PAGE OF THE NATIONAL ENQUIRER!
SUSAN RICHARDS, I AM COME FOR YOU!
KR-RESH!
IT'S SO HUGE! SO POWERFUL!
IN SOME WAYS, IT REMINDS ME OF THE THING!
SURRENDER AND YOUR DEATH SHALL BE MERCIFUL AND QUICK!
TURNING INVISIBLE WILL AVAIL YOU NOUGHT!
MAYBE NOT, TALL, DARK AND UGLY...
BUT IF I CAN JUST REACH MY PURSE AND F.F. SIGNAL FLARE-GUN...
FOOLISH FEMALE! YOUR POWERS ARE AS NOTHING AGAINST ME...
NO!
HE'S FILLING THE ROOM WITH FLYING, CLINGING DIRT-- COATING ME...
AND IT'S HARDENING... LIKE CEMENT... I... CAN'T... MOVE...

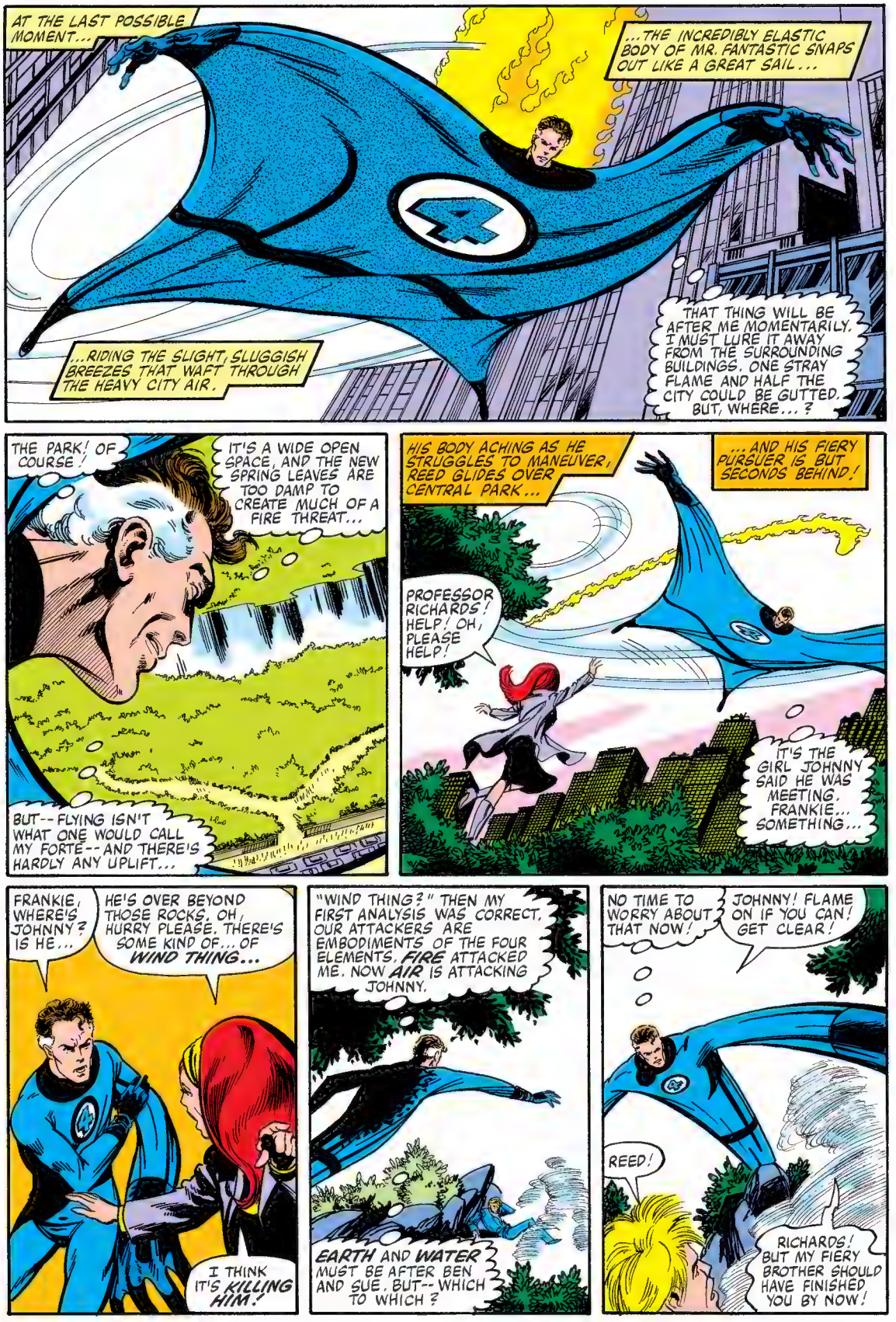

ELSEWHERE, A FEW SHORT BLOCKS TO THE SOUTH, AND A FEW MINUTES AGO, A MATINEE CROWD LEAVES A BROADWAY THEATRE...
ELEPHANT MAN
ELEPHAN-MAN
TAXI
...LARGELY UNAWARE OF TWO CELEBRITIES IN THEIR MIDST...
...BEN GRIMM, THE INCREDIBLY POWERFUL THING, AND HIS LADY LOVE, FAMED BLIND SCULPTRESS ALICIA MASTERS.
OH, BEN, WASN'T THAT A WONDERFUL PLAY? SO TERRIBLY SAD AND YET SO BEAUTIFUL.
YEAH, IT SNIFF HAD ITS MOMENTS...
AW, CRUMBS! WHAT A LOUSY TIME FER IT TO START RAININ'!
RAINING? WHAT ARE YOU TALKING ABOUT?
IT ISN'T RAINING, BEN!
HOLY COW, SHE'S RIGHT! THE REST OF THE STREET IS BONE DRY! IT'S ONLY RAININ' ON ME!
BEN? BEN, WHAT IS IT? WHAT'S HAPPENING?
BEFORE THE STARTLED THING CAN ANSWER, THE "RAIN" CHANGES TO SOMETHING FAR WORSE...
GLUB!
A BUBBLE OF WATER! IT'S ALL AROUND ME-- MOVIN' WHEN I MOVE-- I'LL DROWN UNLESS...
BEN! PLEASE! WHAT'S WRONG? WHY DON'T YOU ANSWER?
I WAS BREATHIN' OUT WHEN THIS THING HIT ME-- NO MORE'N A COUPLA SECONDS OF AIR LEFT...!
GOTTA KEEP CALM-- IF I PANIC I'M DONE FOR!
MAYBE-- IF I DIG UP THE SIDEWALK I CAN FIND AIR-- FIND A WAY OUT...

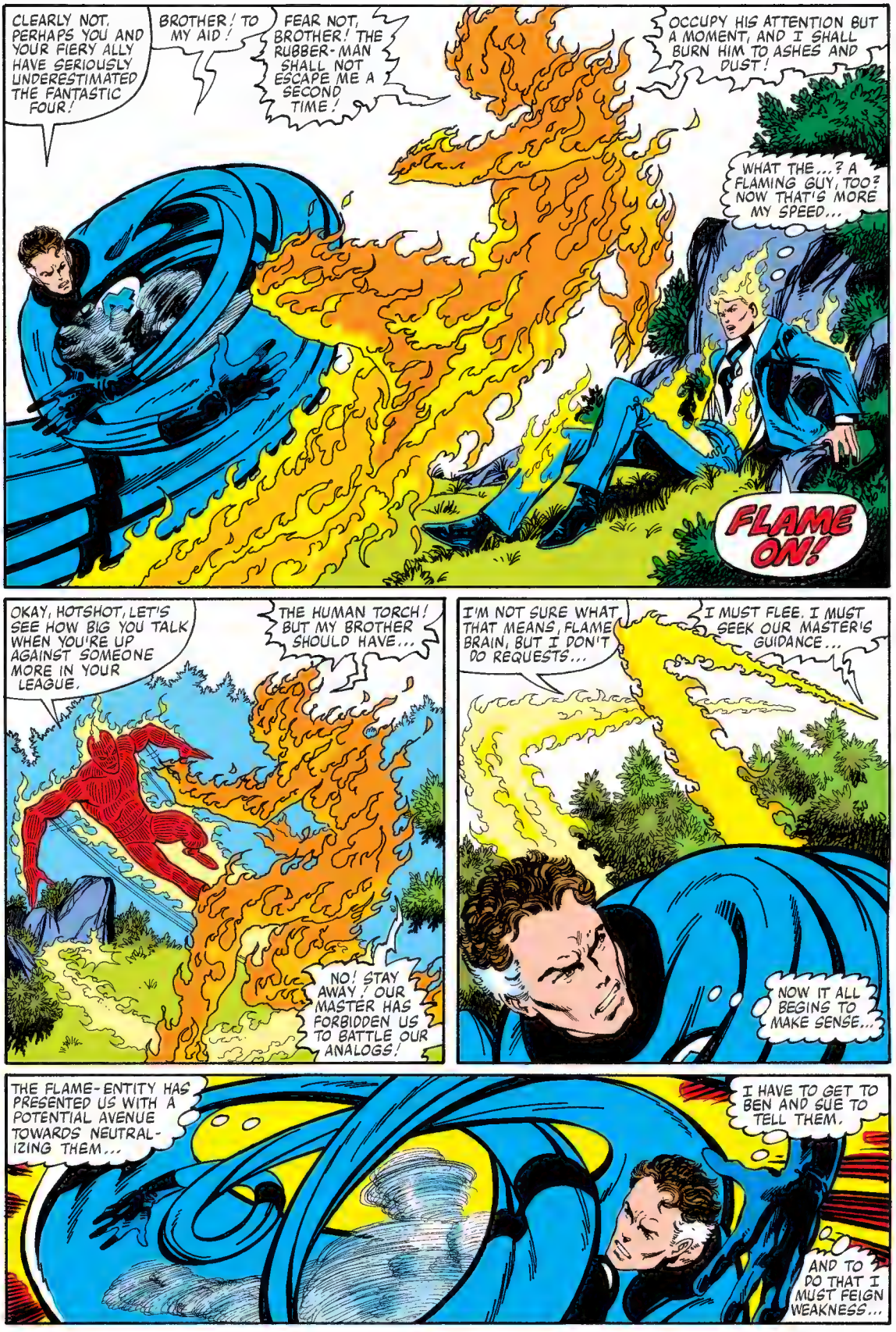

S'NO GOOD! NO MATTER HOW DEEP I GO THIS BLASTED WATER BUBBLE'S GONNA STAY RIGHT WITH ME...!
BUT THERE'S GOTTA BE A WAY OUT. THERE'S GOTTA!
GETTIN' HARD TO THINK-- TO CONCENTRATE...
MY LUNGS FEEL LIKE THEY'RE ABOUT TA BURST... NO MORE AIR... NO MORE...
AND, AS A BLOOD RED VEIL BEGINS TO DRAW CLOSED ACROSS THE THING'S BRAIN...
...HIGH IN THE AIR OVER NEW YORK'S LEGENDARY CENTRAL PARK...
...A BRIGHT RED COMET RESOLVES ITSELF INTO THE SHAPE OF A MAN--A MAN NAMED JOHNNY STORM...
...THE HUMAN TORCH!
THERE SHE IS!
AT HIS UNSPOKEN COMMAND THE TORCH'S FLAME DIMINISHES, AND HE DROPS TOWARDS THE PARK...
BETTER FLAME OFF OUT OF SIGHT. I DON'T KNOW WHY MY FLAME UPSETS FRANKIE SO MUCH...
BUT IT'S ENOUGH TO KNOW THAT IT DOES. SO, EXIT ONE HIGH-FLYING SUPER HERO...
ENTER ONE LOVE-STRUCK YOUNG MAN.
FRANKIE? FRANKIE RAYE?
JOHNNY!
I HALF EXPECTED YOU TO COME SWOOPING DOWN, BLAZING LIKE A BONFIRE!
NO... I MAY BE A LITTLE THICK-HEADED AT TIMES, BUT EVEN I GET THE MESSAGE SOONER OR LATER.
I'M A LITTLE SURPRISED YOU AGREED TO SEE ME, THOUGH.
WHY NOT?
AFTER ALL, WE CAME DANGEROUSLY CLOSE TO MEANING SOMETHING TO EACH OTHER...

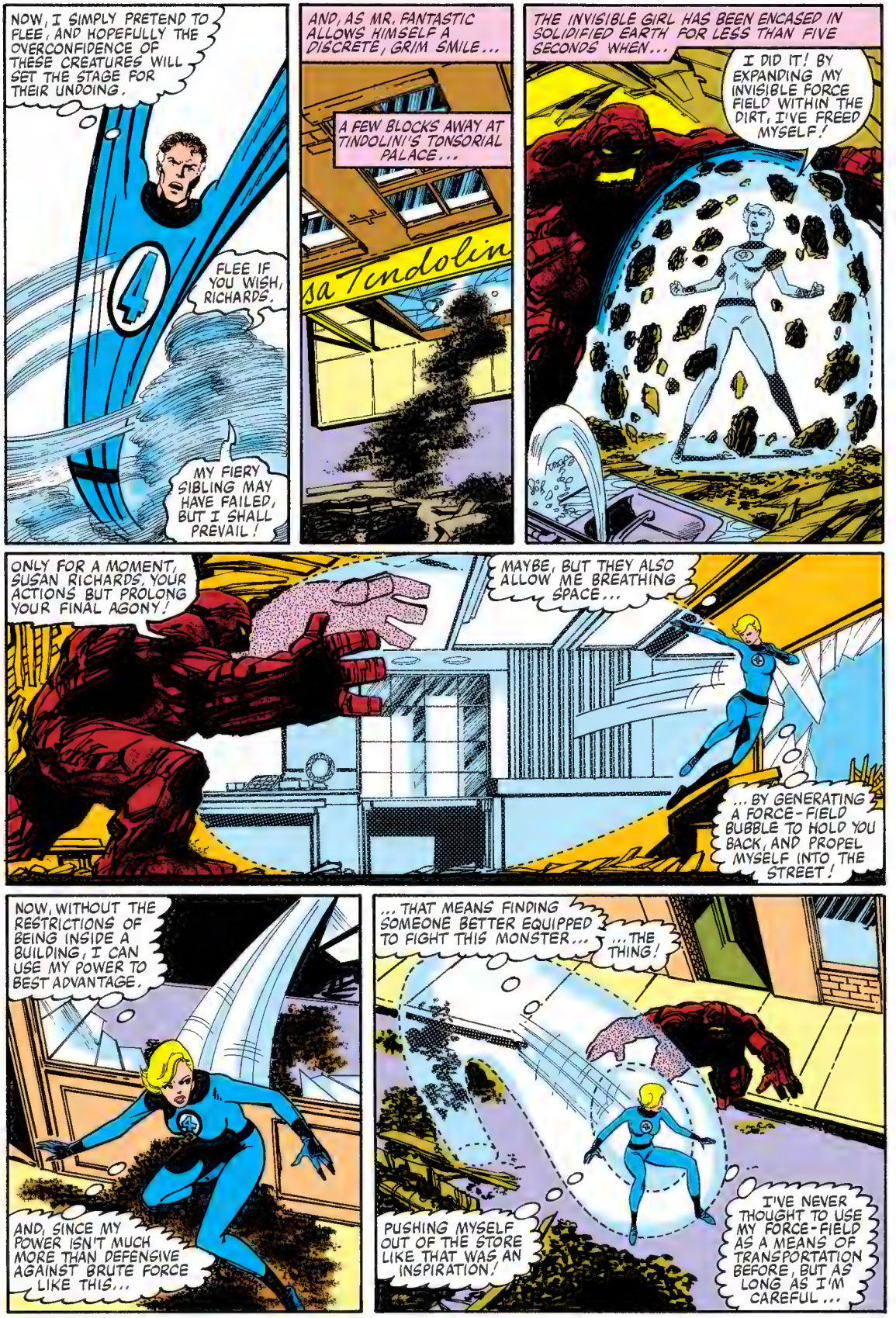

"DANGEROUSLY CLOSE?" IS THAT ALL YOU CAN SAY? I WAS READY TO REWRITE MY WHOLE LIFE FOR YOU, READY TO QUIT THE F.F. READY TO GIVE UP BEING THE HUMAN TORCH.
DOESN'T THAT TELL YOU HOW I FEEL ABOUT YOU?
JOHNNY, PLEASE --THERE'S MORE TO IT THAN THAT ...SO MUCH MORE.
HOW CAN I MAKE YOU UNDERSTAND? YOU DON'T KNOW ME, YOU DON'T KNOW WHO -- OR WHAT -- I AM.
ISN'T IT ENOUGH TO KNOW I LOVE YOU, FRANKIE? WHAT MORE DO I...
BUT, BEFORE THE TORCH CAN FINISH...
WHAT THE...? WHAT'S GOING ON WITH THE WIND?
IT'S... IT'S LIKE A TORNADO BLOWING UP ALL OF A...
JOHNNY!
HOLY -- IT IS A TORNADO! A MINIATURE TORNADO SNATCHING US UP INTO THE AIR!
WHOOF! THE WIND -- IT'S DROPPED ME!
BUT IT'S STILL GOT JOHNNY!
THE WIND'S -- WHIRLING ME SO FAST -- I CAN'T FLAME-ON, I CAN'T SAVE MYSELF!
DROPPING TOWARDS THOSE ROCKS...
A BONE-JARRING IMPACT, AND THE TORCH SLUMPS INTO SEMI-CONSCIOUSNESS...
AND AS HE DOES THE SWIRLING WINDS SHRINK TO A VAGUELY HUMAN SHAPE!

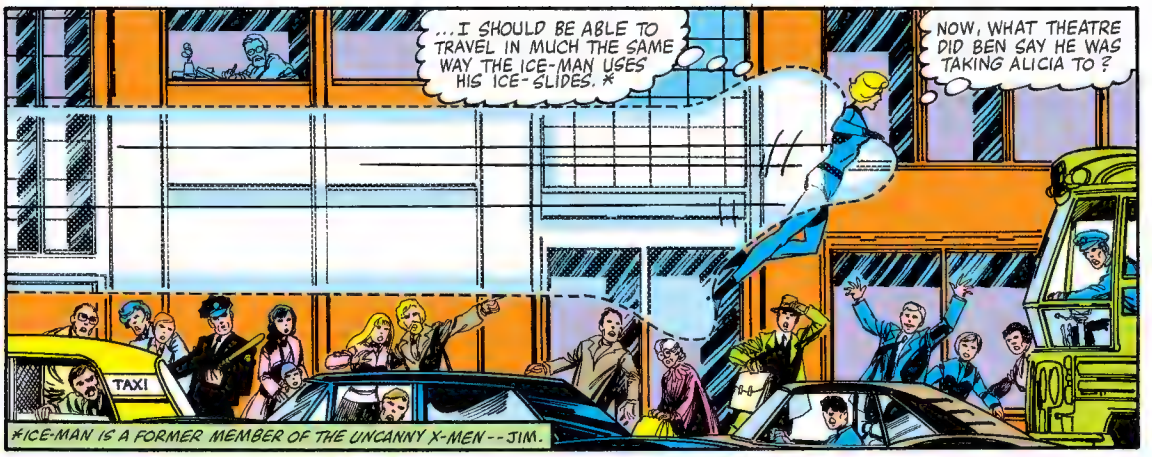

ELSEWHERE, JUST MINUTES AGO...
DWARFED BY THE GLASS AND STEEL TITANS THAT SURROUND IT, THE BAXTER BUILDING IS NOT THE IMPRESSIVE SIGHT IT WAS YEARS AGO.
BUT IT IS STILL ONE OF THE MOST FAMOUS AND OFT-VISITED LANDMARKS IN ALL MANHATTAN...
FOR IT IS THE HEADQUARTERS OF THE FABULOUS FANTASTIC FOUR.
AND, IN ONE OF THE MANY LABORATORIES HOUSED IN THOSE UPPER FIVE FLOORS...
YES, MY SENSOR DEVICES INDICATE A DEFINITE INFLUX OF PECULIAR ENERGIES TO THE CITY...
BUT THE PRECISE NATURE OF THOSE ENERGIES SEEMS OUTSIDE THE SCANNER'S CAPACITY TO MEASURE.
THIS IS REED RICHARDS--MR. FANTASTIC--HUSBAND TO THE INVISIBLE GIRL AND LEADER OF THE FANTASTIC FOUR.
HMM! I WOULDN'T HAVE THOUGHT ANY ENERGY FORMS WOULD BE BEYOND THE ANALYZING CAPABILITIES OF THESE...
THAT'S ODD--SUDDENLY IT'S BECOME ALMOST UNBEARABLY HOT IN HERE...
HAVE THE AIR-CONDITIONING UNITS MALFUNCTIONED?
PERHAPS I SHOULD OPEN A WINDOW WHILE I RUN A CHECK ON THEM...
AN ELECTRIC HUM AS THE WINDOW SLIDES OPEN, THEN...
GOOD HEAVENS! A BLAST OF FLAME THROUGH THE WINDOW!
FOOOSH
TORCH?!
JOHNNY, IS THAT YOU?

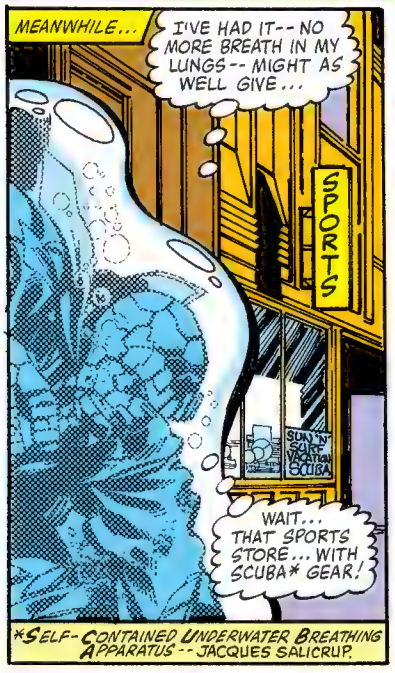

NO, FOOLISH MORTAL! I AM NOT THE HUMAN TORCH! I AM HE WHO IS THE LIVING FLAME!
AND I AM YOUR DEATH, REED RICHARDS!
LIVING FLAME?
IT'S SOME KIND OF ELEMENTAL FIRE CREATURE -- BUT WHO HAS THE ABILITY TO CREATE SUCH A THING?
AND AS THE GIANT INTELLECT OF THE MAN CALLED MR. FANTASTIC PONDERS THAT QUESTION...
OUTSIDE, A WALL OF LIVING FIRE SURROUNDS THE UPPER FLOORS OF THE BAXTER BUILDING...
THE TEMPERATURE IS BECOMING TOO HIGH --SOON IT WILL BE INTOLERABLE.
YOUR PUNY ATTEMPTS TO EVADE ME WILL AVAIL YOU NOUGHT, RICHARDS. SOON YOU WILL DIE, AS MY COUNTERPARTS ARE EVEN NOW DESTROYING YOUR PARTNERS.
WHAT? THE OTHERS ARE IN DANGER TOO?
I'VE GOT TO REACH THEM -- TO SEE WHAT KIND OF MENACE THEY FACE -- PERHAPS FIND A CLUE TO DEFEATING THIS THREAT...
WITH HARDLY A SECOND'S THOUGHT TO HIS OWN SAFETY, REED RICHARDS LAUNCHES HIMSELF THROUGH THE SURROUNDING FLAMES...
...AND PLUNGING THROUGH THE COOL OUTSIDE AIR TOWARDS THE ROOFTOPS BELOW.
THAT WAS TOO CLOSE! ONLY MY SPEED SAVED ME FROM SERIOUS INJURY!

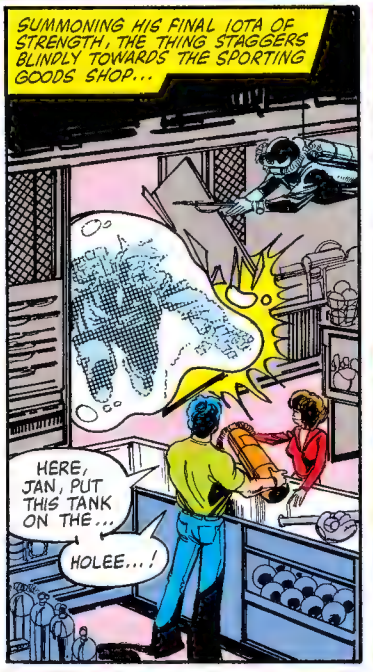

AT THE LAST POSSIBLE MOMENT...
...THE INCREDIBLY ELASTIC BODY OF MR. FANTASTIC SNAPS OUT LIKE A GREAT SAIL...
...RIDING THE SLIGHT, SLUGGISH BREEZES THAT WAFT THROUGH THE HEAVY CITY AIR.
THAT THING WILL BE AFTER ME MOMENTARILY. I MUST LURE IT AWAY FROM THE SURROUNDING BUILDINGS. ONE STRAY FLAME AND HALF THE CITY COULD BE GUTTED. BUT, WHERE...?
THE PARK! OF COURSE!
IT'S A WIDE OPEN SPACE, AND THE NEW SPRING LEAVES ARE TOO DAMP TO CREATE MUCH OF A FIRE THREAT...
BUT-- FLYING ISN'T WHAT ONE WOULD CALL MY FORTE-- AND THERE'S HARDLY ANY UPLIFT...
HIS BODY ACHING AS HE STRUGGLES TO MANEUVER, REED GLIDES OVER CENTRAL PARK...
...AND HIS FIERY PURSUER IS BUT SECONDS BEHIND!
PROFESSOR RICHARDS! HELP! OH, PLEASE HELP!
IT'S THE GIRL JOHNNY SAID HE WAS MEETING. FRANKIE... SOMETHING...
FRANKIE, WHERE'S JOHNNY? IS HE...
HE'S OVER BEYOND THOSE ROCKS. OH, HURRY PLEASE. THERE'S SOME KIND OF... OF WIND THING...
I THINK IT'S KILLING HIM!
"WIND THING?" THEN MY FIRST ANALYSIS WAS CORRECT. OUR ATTACKERS ARE EMBODIMENTS OF THE FOUR ELEMENTS. FIRE ATTACKED ME. NOW AIR IS ATTACKING JOHNNY.
EARTH AND WATER MUST BE AFTER BEN AND SUE. BUT-- WHICH TO WHICH?
NO TIME TO WORRY ABOUT THAT NOW!
JOHNNY! FLAME ON IF YOU CAN! GET CLEAR!
REED!
RICHARDS! BUT MY FIERY BROTHER SHOULD HAVE FINISHED YOU BY NOW!

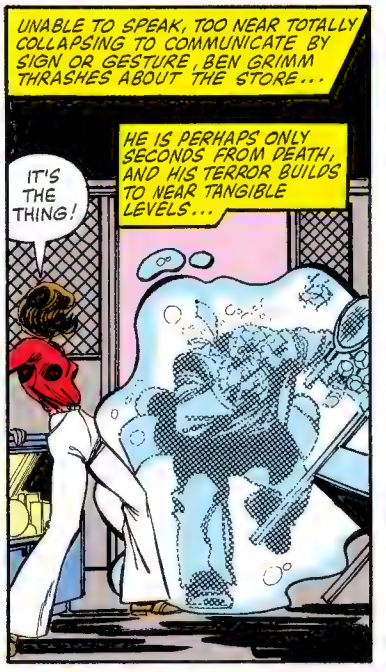

CLEARLY NOT. PERHAPS YOU AND YOUR FIERY ALLY HAVE SERIOUSLY UNDERESTIMATED THE FANTASTIC FOUR!
BROTHER! TO MY AID!
FEAR NOT, BROTHER! THE RUBBER-MAN SHALL NOT ESCAPE ME A SECOND TIME!
OCCUPY HIS ATTENTION BUT A MOMENT, AND I SHALL BURN HIM TO ASHES AND DUST!
WHAT THE...? A FLAMING GUY, TOO? NOW THAT'S MORE MY SPEED...
FLAME ON!
OKAY, HOTSHOT, LET'S SEE HOW BIG YOU TALK WHEN YOU'RE UP AGAINST SOMEONE MORE IN YOUR LEAGUE.
THE HUMAN TORCH! BUT MY BROTHER SHOULD HAVE...
NO! STAY AWAY! OUR MASTER HAS FORBIDDEN US TO BATTLE OUR ANALOGS!
I'M NOT SURE WHAT THAT MEANS, FLAME BRAIN, BUT I DON'T DO REQUESTS...
I MUST FLEE. I MUST SEEK OUR MASTER'S GUIDANCE...
NOW IT ALL BEGINS TO MAKE SENSE...
THE FLAME-ENTITY HAS PRESENTED US WITH A POTENTIAL AVENUE TOWARDS NEUTRALIZING THEM...
I HAVE TO GET TO BEN AND SUE TO TELL THEM.
AND TO DO THAT I MUST FEIGN WEAKNESS...


NOW, I SIMPLY PRETEND TO FLEE, AND HOPEFULLY THE OVERCONFIDENCE OF THESE CREATURES WILL SET THE STAGE FOR THEIR UNDOING.
FLEE IF YOU WISH, RICHARDS.
MY FIERY SIBLING MAY HAVE FAILED, BUT I SHALL PREVAIL!
AND, AS MR. FANTASTIC ALLOWS HIMSELF A DISCRETE, GRIM SMILE...
A FEW BLOCKS AWAY AT TINDOLINI'S TONSORIAL PALACE...
sa Tindolin
THE INVISIBLE GIRL HAS BEEN ENCASED IN SOLIDIFIED EARTH FOR LESS THAN FIVE SECONDS WHEN...
I DID IT! BY EXPANDING MY INVISIBLE FORCE FIELD WITHIN THE DIRT, I'VE FREED MYSELF!
ONLY FOR A MOMENT, SUSAN RICHARDS. YOUR ACTIONS BUT PROLONG YOUR FINAL AGONY!
MAYBE, BUT THEY ALSO ALLOW ME BREATHING SPACE...
... BY GENERATING A FORCE-FIELD BUBBLE TO HOLD YOU BACK, AND PROPEL MYSELF INTO THE STREET!
NOW, WITHOUT THE RESTRICTIONS OF BEING INSIDE A BUILDING, I CAN USE MY POWER TO BEST ADVANTAGE.
AND, SINCE MY POWER ISN'T MUCH MORE THAN DEFENSIVE AGAINST BRUTE FORCE LIKE THIS...
... THAT MEANS FINDING SOMEONE BETTER EQUIPPED TO FIGHT THIS MONSTER...
...THE THING!
PUSHING MYSELF OUT OF THE STORE LIKE THAT WAS AN INSPIRATION!
I'VE NEVER THOUGHT TO USE MY FORCE-FIELD AS A MEANS OF TRANSPORTATION BEFORE, BUT AS LONG AS I'M CAREFUL...


...I SHOULD BE ABLE TO TRAVEL IN MUCH THE SAME WAY THE ICE-MAN USES HIS ICE-SLIDES. *
NOW, WHAT THEATRE DID BEN SAY HE WAS TAKING ALICIA TO?
TAXI
*ICE-MAN IS A FORMER MEMBER OF THE UNCANNY X-MEN -- JIM.

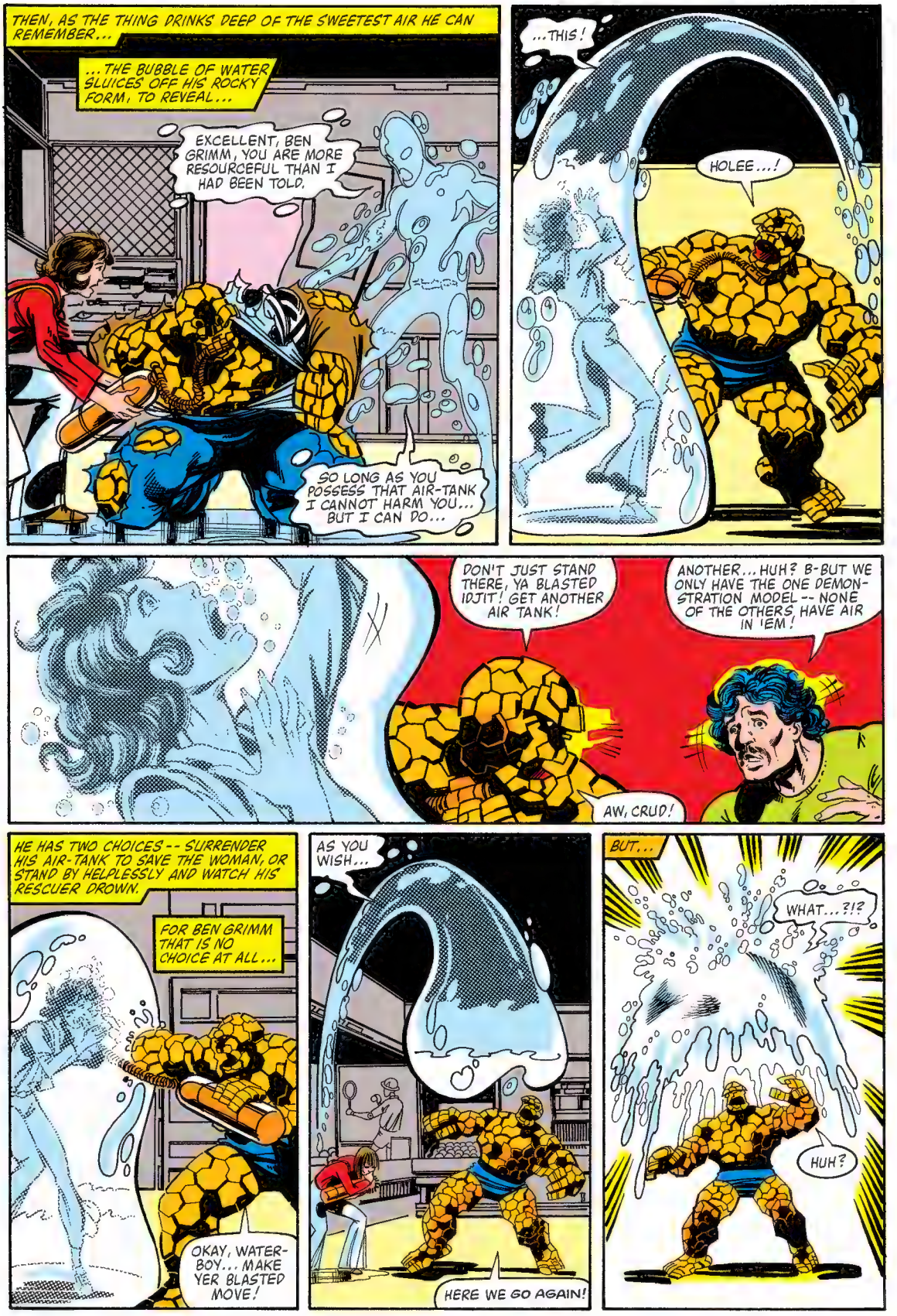

MEANWHILE...
I'VE HAD IT -- NO MORE BREATH IN MY LUNGS -- MIGHT AS WELL GIVE...
SPORTS
WAIT... THAT SPORTS STORE... WITH SCUBA* GEAR!
*SELF-CONTAINED UNDERWATER BREATHING APPARATUS -- JACQUES SALICRUP.


SUMMONING HIS FINAL IOTA OF STRENGTH, THE THING STAGGERS BLINDLY TOWARDS THE SPORTING GOODS SHOP...
HERE, JAN, PUT THIS TANK ON THE...
HOLEE...!

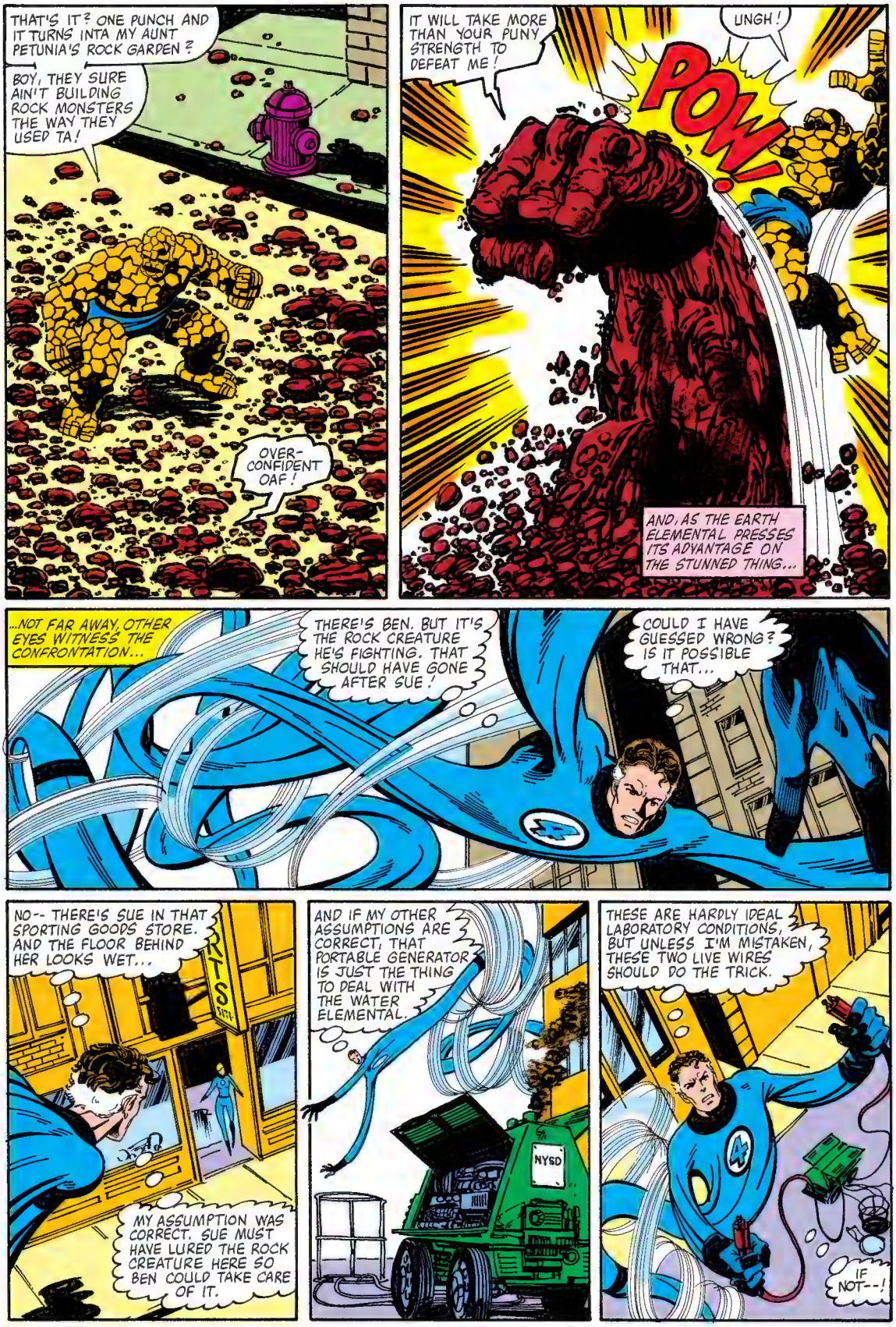

UNABLE TO SPEAK, TOO NEAR TOTALLY COLLAPSING TO COMMUNICATE BY SIGN OR GESTURE, BEN GRIMM THRASHES ABOUT THE STORE...
IT'S THE THING!
HE IS PERHAPS ONLY SECONDS FROM DEATH, AND HIS TERROR BUILDS TO NEAR TANGIBLE LEVELS...

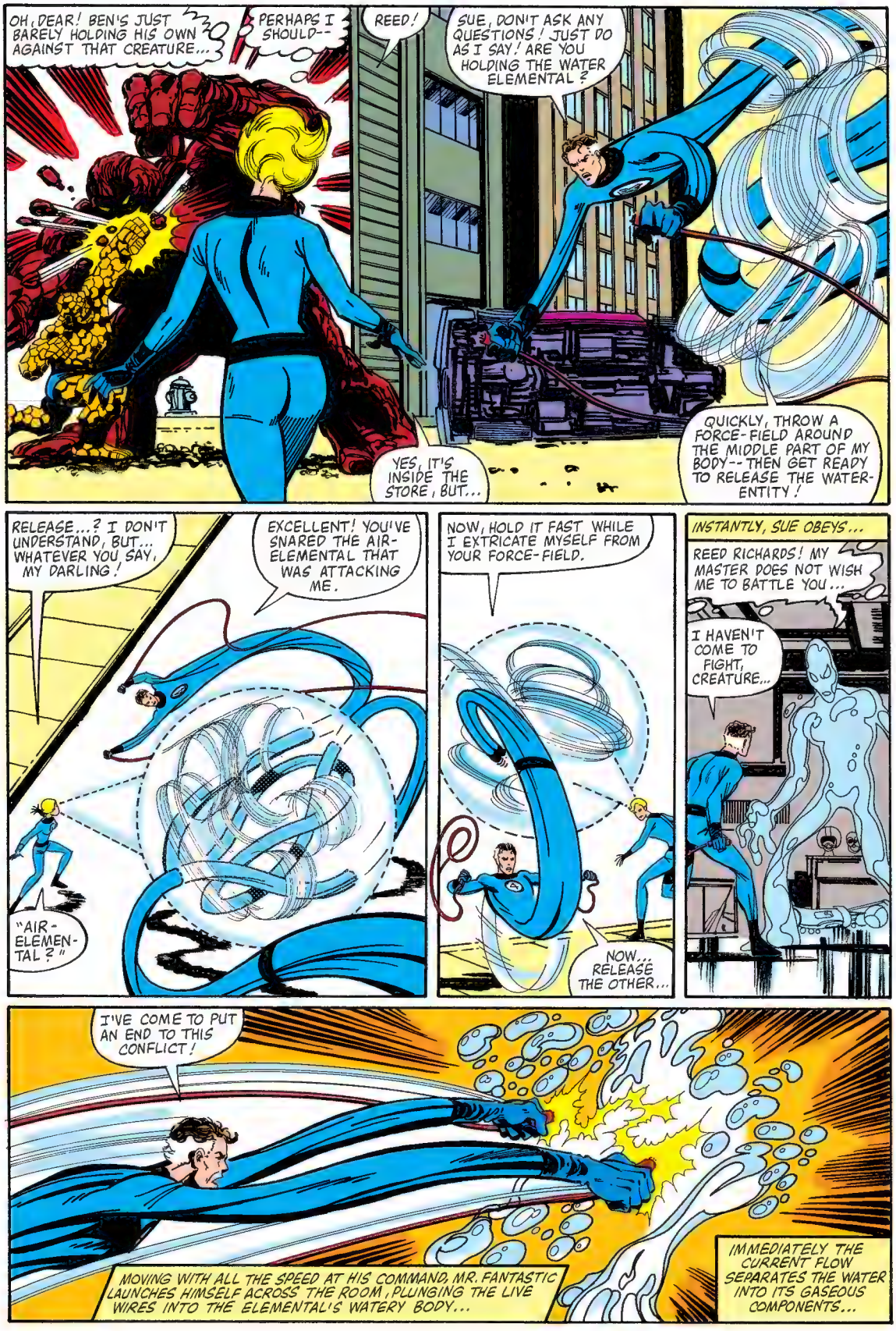
DON! DO SOMETHING! HE'S... HE'S DROWNING!
STAFF
DROWNING... YEAH... HE'S... I MEAN... I GOTTA... GOTTA... OH, CRIPES, WHAT CAN I DO? WHAT CAN...

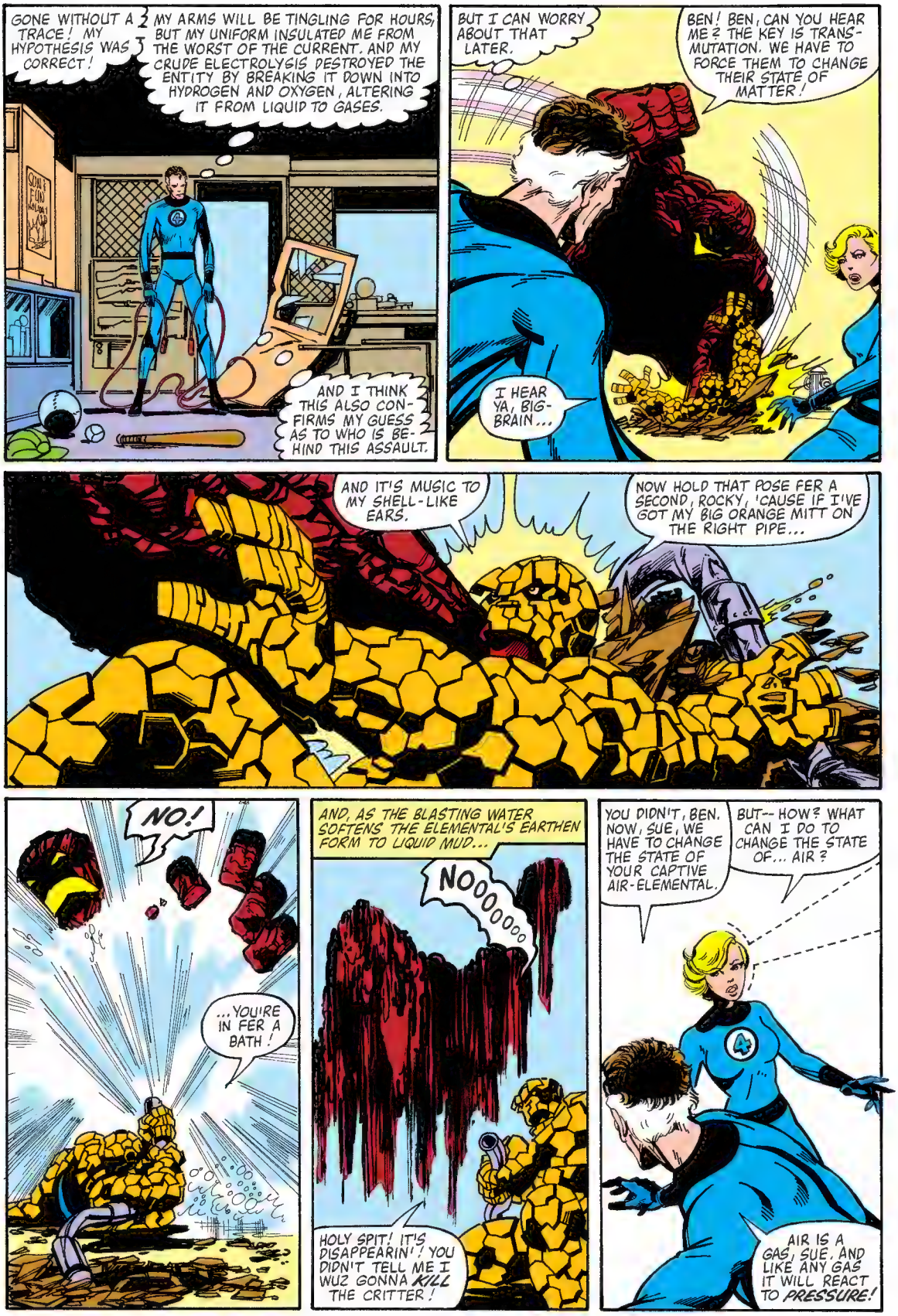
OH, FOR HEAVEN'S SAKE, DON! GIVE ME THAT SCUBA TANK!
SHE ACTS WITHOUT THOUGHT OF THE DANGER IN WHICH SHE PLACES HERSELF, THRUSTING THE LIFEBRINGING AIRHOSE INTO THE THING'S WATER PRISON...
HUHHHH!

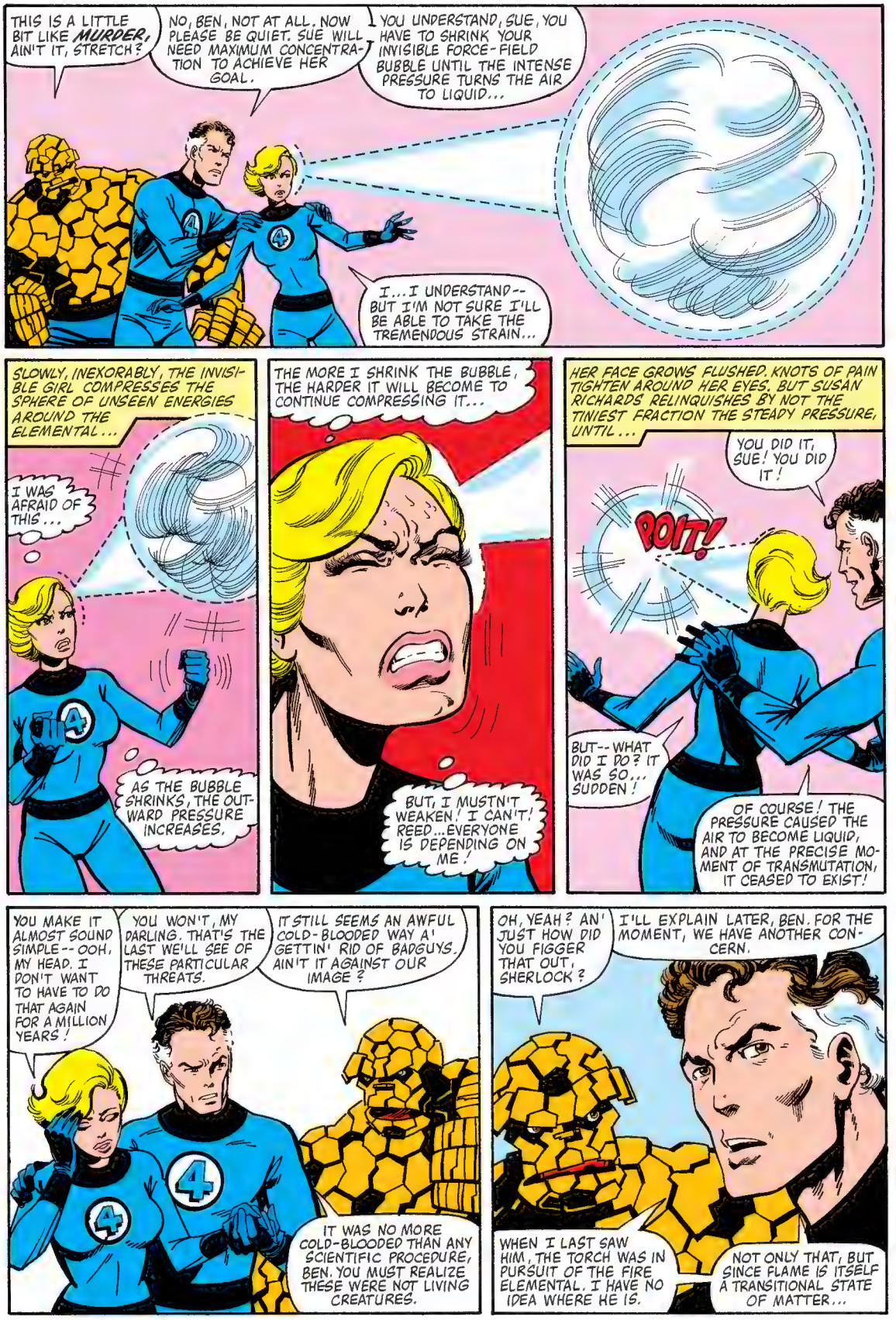

THEN, AS THE THING DRINKS DEEP OF THE SWEETEST AIR HE CAN REMEMBER...
...THE BUBBLE OF WATER SLUICES OFF HIS ROCKY FORM, TO REVEAL...
EXCELLENT, BEN GRIMM, YOU ARE MORE RESOURCEFUL THAN I HAD BEEN TOLD.
SO LONG AS YOU POSSESS THAT AIR-TANK I CANNOT HARM YOU... BUT I CAN DO...
...THIS!
HOLEE...!
DON'T JUST STAND THERE, YA BLASTED IDJIT! GET ANOTHER AIR TANK!
ANOTHER... HUH? B-BUT WE ONLY HAVE THE ONE DEMONSTRATION MODEL -- NONE OF THE OTHERS HAVE AIR IN 'EM!
AW, CRUD!
HE HAS TWO CHOICES -- SURRENDER HIS AIR-TANK TO SAVE THE WOMAN, OR STAND BY HELPLESSLY AND WATCH HIS RESCUER DROWN.
FOR BEN GRIMM THAT IS NO CHOICE AT ALL...
OKAY, WATER-BOY... MAKE YER BLASTED MOVE!
AS YOU WISH...
HERE WE GO AGAIN!
BUT...
WHAT...?!?
HUH?

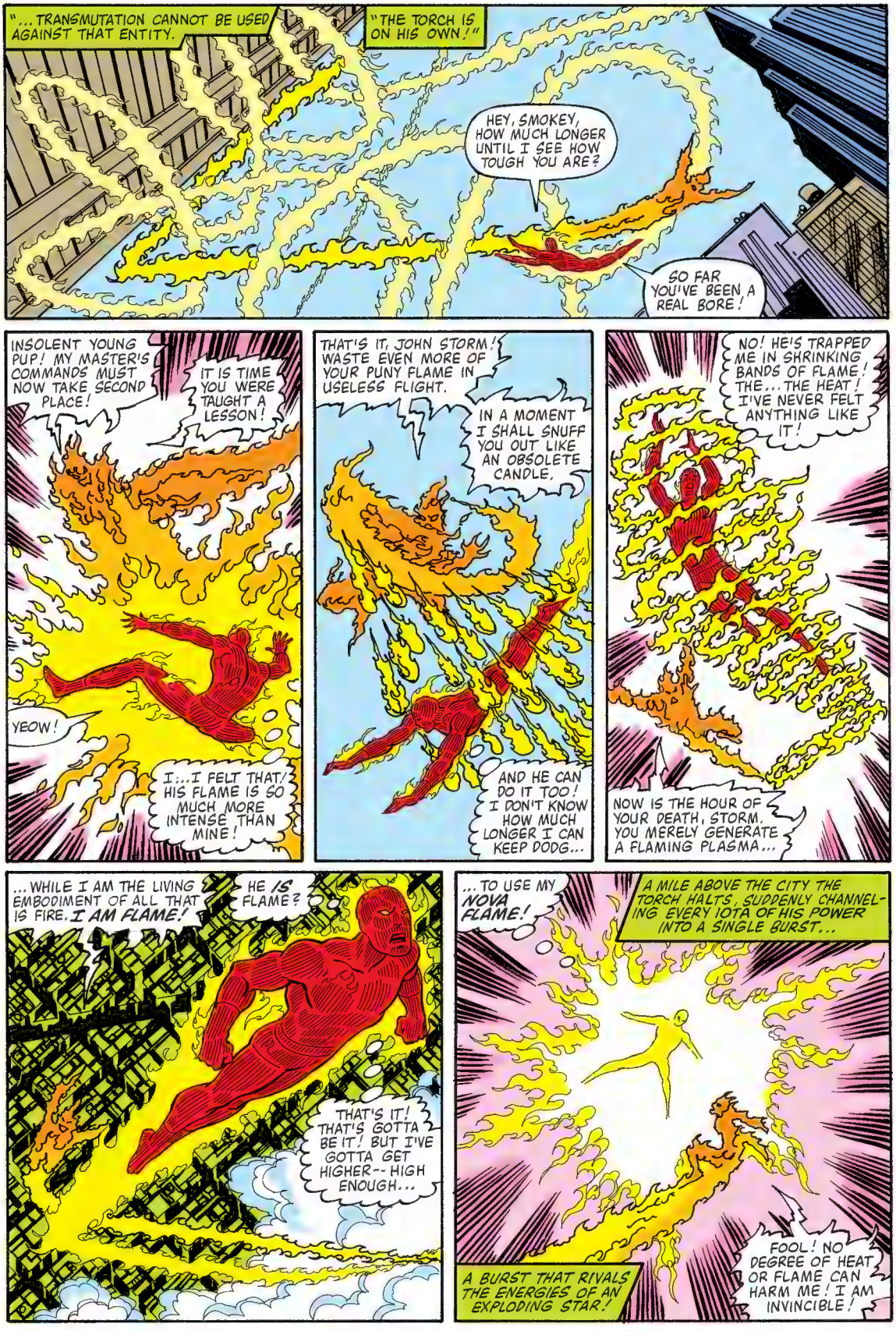
IT'S SUZIE'S INVISIBLE FORCE-FIELD! I SHOULDA KNOWN! NICE SAVE, KID! THANKS!
MY PLEASURE, BEN! BUT I'M AFRAID I DIDN'T COME JUST TO SAVE YOU!
I NEED HELP WITH A LITTLE PLAYMATE OF MY OWN!
HUH? I DON'T... SUE, LOOK OUT!
INTERFERING FEMALE! OUR MASTER HAS NOT FORBID ME TO ATTACK...
YARH!
BLOOSH!
DON'T WORRY, BEN, MY INVISIBLE FORCE-FIELD CAN PROTECT BOTH OF US.
WAY TA GO, SUZIE. NOT WHAT WERE YOU SAYIN' ABOUT NEEDIN' MY HELP?
YOU'RE NOT THE ONLY ONE WHO'S HAD THEIR DAY SPOILED, BEN.
TAKE A LOOK OUTSIDE...
HEY, NOW THAT'S MORE LIKE IT! HIM I CAN HIT!
IT'S CLOBBERIN' TIME!
SHOOM!

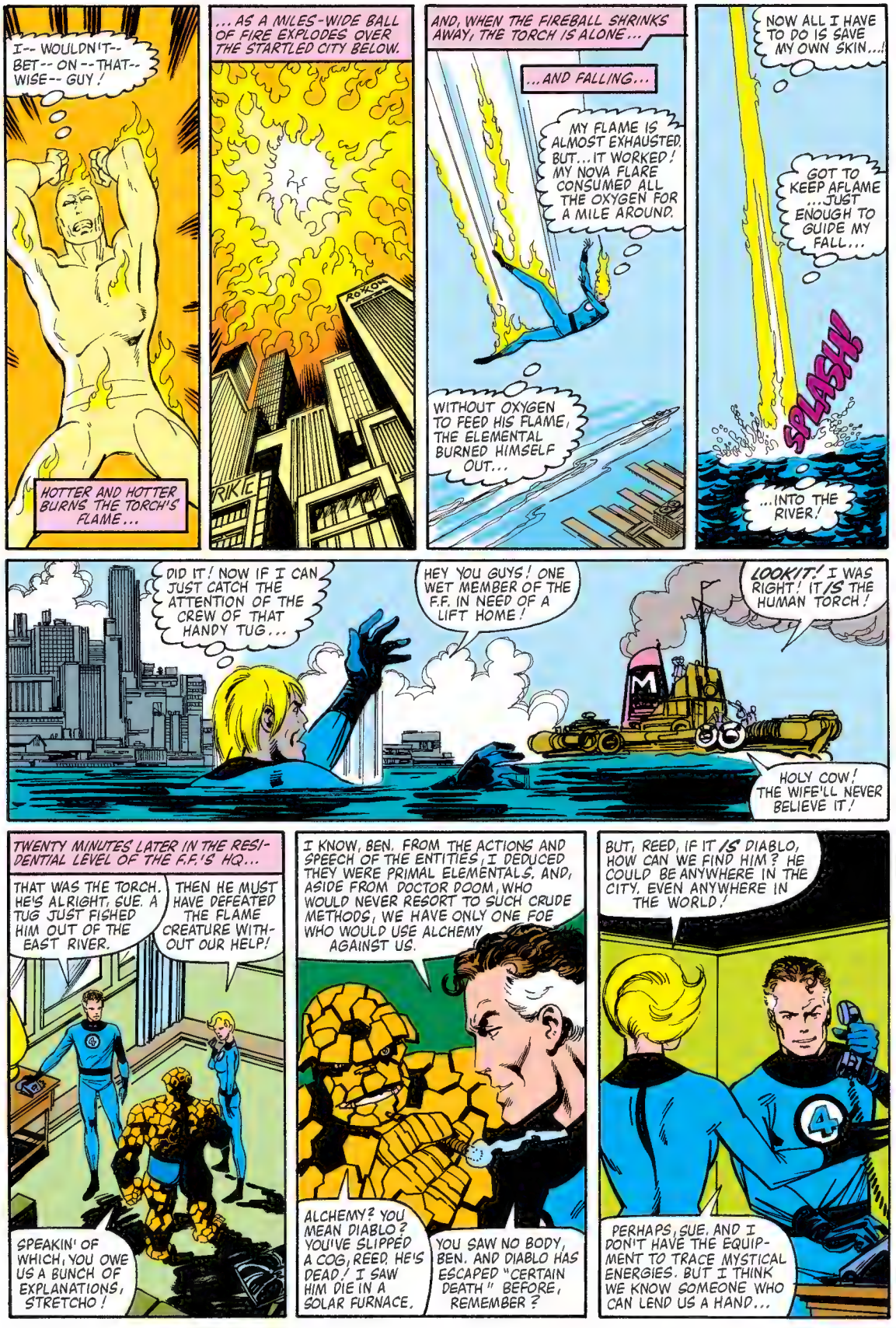

THAT'S IT? ONE PUNCH AND IT TURNS INTA MY AUNT PETUNIA'S ROCK GARDEN?
BOY, THEY SURE AIN'T BUILDING ROCK MONSTERS THE WAY THEY USED TA!
OVER-CONFIDENT OAF!
IT WILL TAKE MORE THAN YOUR PUNY STRENGTH TO DEFEAT ME!
UNGH!
POW!
AND, AS THE EARTH ELEMENTAL PRESSES ITS ADVANTAGE ON THE STUNNED THING...
...NOT FAR AWAY, OTHER EYES WITNESS THE CONFRONTATION...
THERE'S BEN. BUT IT'S THE ROCK CREATURE HE'S FIGHTING. THAT SHOULD HAVE GONE AFTER SUE!
COULD I HAVE GUESSED WRONG? IS IT POSSIBLE THAT...
NO-- THERE'S SUE IN THAT SPORTING GOODS STORE. AND THE FLOOR BEHIND HER LOOKS WET...
KIS
MY ASSUMPTION WAS CORRECT. SUE MUST HAVE LURED THE ROCK CREATURE HERE SO BEN COULD TAKE CARE OF IT.
AND IF MY OTHER ASSUMPTIONS ARE CORRECT, THAT PORTABLE GENERATOR IS JUST THE THING TO DEAL WITH THE WATER ELEMENTAL.
NYSD
THESE ARE HARDLY IDEAL LABORATORY CONDITIONS, BUT UNLESS I'M MISTAKEN, THESE TWO LIVE WIRES SHOULD DO THE TRICK.
IF NOT--!

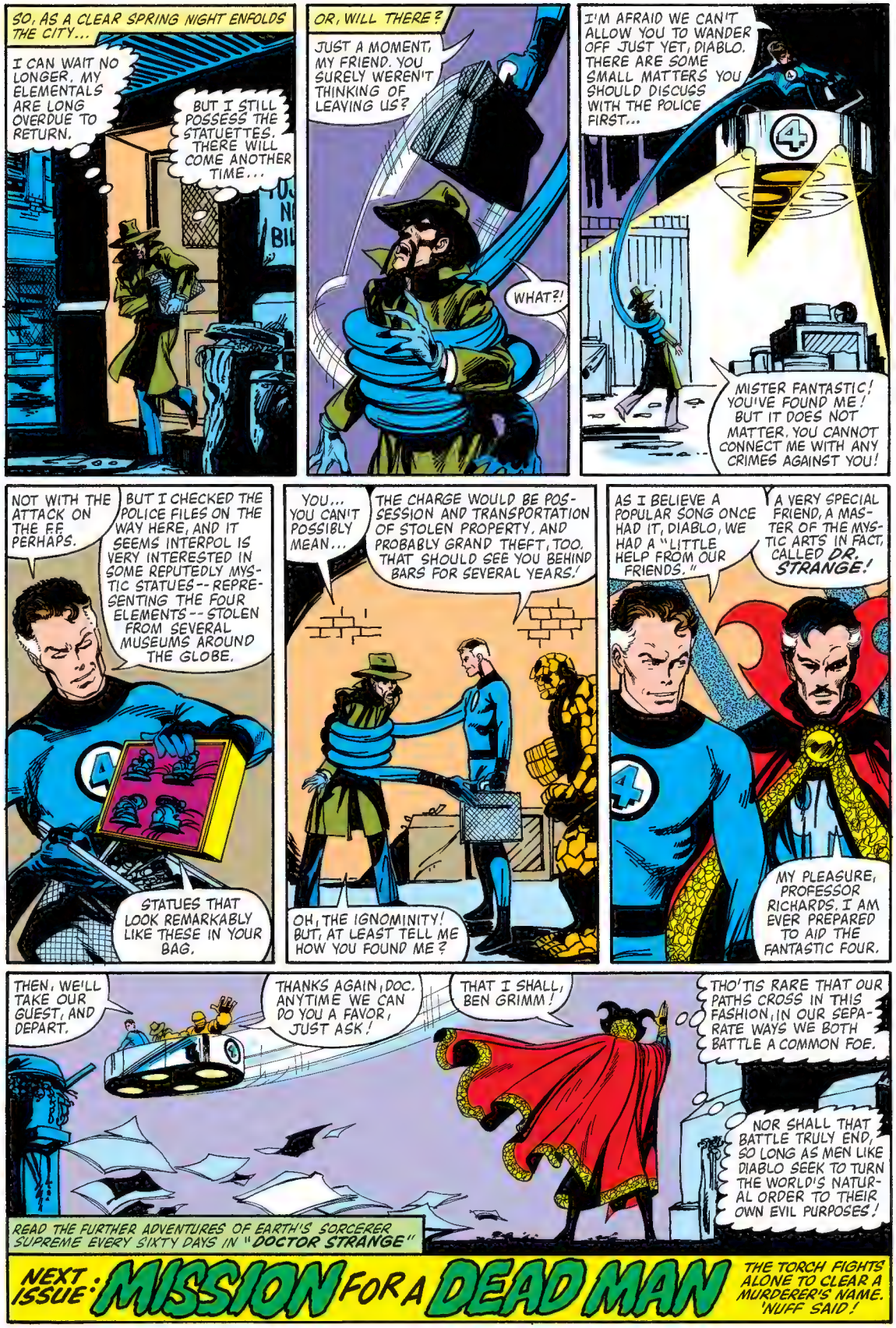

OH, DEAR! BEN'S JUST BARELY HOLDING HIS OWN AGAINST THAT CREATURE...
PERHAPS I SHOULD--
REED!
SUE, DON'T ASK ANY QUESTIONS! JUST DO AS I SAY! ARE YOU HOLDING THE WATER ELEMENTAL?
YES, IT'S INSIDE THE STORE, BUT...
QUICKLY, THROW A FORCE-FIELD AROUND THE MIDDLE PART OF MY BODY--THEN GET READY TO RELEASE THE WATER-ENTITY!
RELEASE...? I DON'T UNDERSTAND, BUT... WHATEVER YOU SAY, MY DARLING!
EXCELLENT! YOU'VE SNARED THE AIR-ELEMENTAL THAT WAS ATTACKING ME.
"AIR-ELEMENTAL?"
NOW, HOLD IT FAST WHILE I EXTRICATE MYSELF FROM YOUR FORCE-FIELD.
NOW... RELEASE THE OTHER...
INSTANTLY, SUE OBEYS...
REED RICHARDS! MY MASTER DOES NOT WISH ME TO BATTLE YOU...
I HAVEN'T COME TO FIGHT, CREATURE...
I'VE COME TO PUT AN END TO THIS CONFLICT!
MOVING WITH ALL THE SPEED AT HIS COMMAND, MR. FANTASTIC LAUNCHES HIMSELF ACROSS THE ROOM, PLUNGING THE LIVE WIRES INTO THE ELEMENTAL'S WATERY BODY...
IMMEDIATELY THE CURRENT FLOW SEPARATES THE WATER INTO ITS GASEOUS COMPONENTS...


GONE WITHOUT A TRACE! MY HYPOTHESIS WAS CORRECT!
MY ARMS WILL BE TINGLING FOR HOURS, BUT MY UNIFORM INSULATED ME FROM THE WORST OF THE CURRENT. AND MY CRUDE ELECTROLYSIS DESTROYED THE ENTITY BY BREAKING IT DOWN INTO HYDROGEN AND OXYGEN, ALTERING IT FROM LIQUID TO GASES.
AND I THINK THIS ALSO CONFIRMS MY GUESS AS TO WHO IS BEHIND THIS ASSAULT.
BUT I CAN WORRY ABOUT THAT LATER.
BEN! BEN, CAN YOU HEAR ME? THE KEY IS TRANSMUTATION. WE HAVE TO FORCE THEM TO CHANGE THEIR STATE OF MATTER!
I HEAR YA, BIG-BRAIN...
AND IT'S MUSIC TO MY SHELL-LIKE EARS.
NOW HOLD THAT POSE FER A SECOND, ROCKY, 'CAUSE IF I'VE GOT MY BIG ORANGE MITT ON THE RIGHT PIPE...
NO!
...YOU'RE IN FER A BATH!
AND, AS THE BLASTING WATER SOFTENS THE ELEMENTAL'S EARTHEN FORM TO LIQUID MUD...
NOOOOOO
HOLY SPIT! IT'S DISAPPEARIN'! YOU DIDN'T TELL ME I WUZ GONNA KILL THE CRITTER!
YOU DIDN'T, BEN. NOW, SUE, WE HAVE TO CHANGE THE STATE OF YOUR CAPTIVE AIR-ELEMENTAL.
BUT-- HOW? WHAT CAN I DO TO CHANGE THE STATE OF... AIR?
AIR IS A GAS, SUE, AND LIKE ANY GAS IT WILL REACT TO PRESSURE!


THIS IS A LITTLE BIT LIKE MURDER, AIN'T IT, STRETCH?
NO, BEN, NOT AT ALL. NOW PLEASE BE QUIET. SUE WILL NEED MAXIMUM CONCENTRATION TO ACHIEVE HER GOAL.
YOU UNDERSTAND, SUE, YOU HAVE TO SHRINK YOUR INVISIBLE FORCE-FIELD BUBBLE UNTIL THE INTENSE PRESSURE TURNS THE AIR TO LIQUID...
I...I UNDERSTAND-- BUT I'M NOT SURE I'LL BE ABLE TO TAKE THE TREMENDOUS STRAIN...
SLOWLY, INEXORABLY, THE INVISIBLE GIRL COMPRESSES THE SPHERE OF UNSEEN ENERGIES AROUND THE ELEMENTAL...
I WAS AFRAID OF THIS...
AS THE BUBBLE SHRINKS, THE OUTWARD PRESSURE INCREASES.
THE MORE I SHRINK THE BUBBLE, THE HARDER IT WILL BECOME TO CONTINUE COMPRESSING IT...
BUT, I MUSTN'T WEAKEN! I CAN'T! REED...EVERYONE IS DEPENDING ON ME!
HER FACE GROWS FLUSHED. KNOTS OF PAIN TIGHTEN AROUND HER EYES. BUT SUSAN RICHARDS RELINQUISHES BY NOT THE TINIEST FRACTION THE STEADY PRESSURE, UNTIL...
YOU DID IT, SUE! YOU DID IT!
POIT!
BUT-- WHAT DID I DO? IT WAS SO... SUDDEN!
OF COURSE! THE PRESSURE CAUSED THE AIR TO BECOME LIQUID, AND AT THE PRECISE MOMENT OF TRANSMUTATION, IT CEASED TO EXIST!
YOU MAKE IT ALMOST SOUND SIMPLE-- OOH, MY HEAD. I DON'T WANT TO HAVE TO DO THAT AGAIN FOR A MILLION YEARS!
YOU WON'T, MY DARLING. THAT'S THE LAST WE'LL SEE OF THESE PARTICULAR THREATS.
IT STILL SEEMS AN AWFUL COLD-BLOODED WAY A' GETTIN' RID OF BADGUYS. AIN'T IT AGAINST OUR IMAGE?
IT WAS NO MORE COLD-BLOODED THAN ANY SCIENTIFIC PROCEDURE, BEN. YOU MUST REALIZE THESE WERE NOT LIVING CREATURES.
OH, YEAH? AN' JUST HOW DID YOU FIGGER THAT OUT, SHERLOCK?
I'LL EXPLAIN LATER, BEN. FOR THE MOMENT, WE HAVE ANOTHER CONCERN.
WHEN I LAST SAW HIM, THE TORCH WAS IN PURSUIT OF THE FIRE ELEMENTAL. I HAVE NO IDEA WHERE HE IS.
NOT ONLY THAT, BUT SINCE FLAME IS ITSELF A TRANSITIONAL STATE OF MATTER...


"... TRANSMUTATION CANNOT BE USED AGAINST THAT ENTITY.
"THE TORCH IS ON HIS OWN!"
HEY, SMOKEY, HOW MUCH LONGER UNTIL I SEE HOW TOUGH YOU ARE?
SO FAR YOU'VE BEEN A REAL BORE!
INSOLENT YOUNG PUP! MY MASTER'S COMMANDS MUST NOW TAKE SECOND PLACE!
IT IS TIME YOU WERE TAUGHT A LESSON!
YEOW!
I...I FELT THAT! HIS FLAME IS SO MUCH MORE INTENSE THAN MINE!
THAT'S IT, JOHN STORM! WASTE EVEN MORE OF YOUR PUNY FLAME IN USELESS FLIGHT.
IN A MOMENT I SHALL SNUFF YOU OUT LIKE AN OBSOLETE CANDLE.
AND HE CAN DO IT TOO! I DON'T KNOW HOW MUCH LONGER I CAN KEEP DODG...
NO! HE'S TRAPPED ME IN SHRINKING BANDS OF FLAME! THE... THE HEAT! I'VE NEVER FELT ANYTHING LIKE IT!
NOW IS THE HOUR OF YOUR DEATH, STORM. YOU MERELY GENERATE A FLAMING PLASMA...
...WHILE I AM THE LIVING EMBODIMENT OF ALL THAT IS FIRE. I AM FLAME!
HE IS FLAME?
THAT'S IT! THAT'S GOTTA BE IT! BUT I'VE GOTTA GET HIGHER-- HIGH ENOUGH...
...TO USE MY NOVA FLAME!
A MILE ABOVE THE CITY THE TORCH HALTS, SUDDENLY CHANNELING EVERY IOTA OF HIS POWER INTO A SINGLE BURST...
A BURST THAT RIVALS THE ENERGIES OF AN EXPLODING STAR!
FOOL! NO DEGREE OF HEAT OR FLAME CAN HARM ME! I AM INVINCIBLE!


I-- WOULDN'T-- BET-- ON --THAT-- WISE-- GUY!
HOTTER AND HOTTER BURNS THE TORCH'S FLAME...
...AS A MILES-WIDE BALL OF FIRE EXPLODES OVER THE STARTLED CITY BELOW.
AND, WHEN THE FIREBALL SHRINKS AWAY, THE TORCH IS ALONE...
...AND FALLING...
MY FLAME IS ALMOST EXHAUSTED, BUT...IT WORKED! MY NOVA FLARE CONSUMED ALL THE OXYGEN FOR A MILE AROUND.
WITHOUT OXYGEN TO FEED HIS FLAME, THE ELEMENTAL BURNED HIMSELF OUT...
NOW ALL I HAVE TO DO IS SAVE MY OWN SKIN...!
GOT TO KEEP AFLAME ...JUST ENOUGH TO GUIDE MY FALL...
SPLASH!
...INTO THE RIVER!
DID IT! NOW IF I CAN JUST CATCH THE ATTENTION OF THE CREW OF THAT HANDY TUG...
HEY YOU GUYS! ONE WET MEMBER OF THE F.F. IN NEED OF A LIFT HOME!
LOOKIT! I WAS RIGHT! IT IS THE HUMAN TORCH!
HOLY COW! THE WIFE'LL NEVER BELIEVE IT!
TWENTY MINUTES LATER IN THE RESIDENTIAL LEVEL OF THE F.F.'S HQ...
THAT WAS THE TORCH. HE'S ALRIGHT, SUE. A TUG JUST FISHED HIM OUT OF THE EAST RIVER.
THEN HE MUST HAVE DEFEATED THE FLAME CREATURE WITHOUT OUR HELP!
SPEAKIN' OF WHICH, YOU OWE US A BUNCH OF EXPLANATIONS, STRETCHO!
I KNOW, BEN. FROM THE ACTIONS AND SPEECH OF THE ENTITIES, I DEDUCED THEY WERE PRIMAL ELEMENTALS. AND, ASIDE FROM DOCTOR DOOM, WHO WOULD NEVER RESORT TO SUCH CRUDE METHODS, WE HAVE ONLY ONE FOE WHO WOULD USE ALCHEMY AGAINST US.
ALCHEMY? YOU MEAN DIABLO? YOU'VE SLIPPED A COG, REED. HE'S DEAD! I SAW HIM DIE IN A SOLAR FURNACE.
YOU SAW NO BODY, BEN. AND DIABLO HAS ESCAPED "CERTAIN DEATH" BEFORE, REMEMBER?
BUT, REED, IF IT IS DIABLO, HOW CAN WE FIND HIM? HE COULD BE ANYWHERE IN THE CITY, EVEN ANYWHERE IN THE WORLD!
PERHAPS, SUE, AND I DON'T HAVE THE EQUIPMENT TO TRACE MYSTICAL ENERGIES. BUT I THINK WE KNOW SOMEONE WHO CAN LEND US A HAND...


SO, AS A CLEAR SPRING NIGHT ENFOLDS THE CITY...
I CAN WAIT NO LONGER. MY ELEMENTALS ARE LONG OVERDUE TO RETURN.
BUT I STILL POSSESS THE STATUETTES. THERE WILL COME ANOTHER TIME...
OR, WILL THERE?
JUST A MOMENT, MY FRIEND. YOU SURELY WEREN'T THINKING OF LEAVING US?
WHAT?!
I'M AFRAID WE CAN'T ALLOW YOU TO WANDER OFF JUST YET, DIABLO. THERE ARE SOME SMALL MATTERS YOU SHOULD DISCUSS WITH THE POLICE FIRST...
MISTER FANTASTIC! YOU'VE FOUND ME! BUT IT DOES NOT MATTER. YOU CANNOT CONNECT ME WITH ANY CRIMES AGAINST YOU!
NOT WITH THE ATTACK ON THE F.F. PERHAPS.
BUT I CHECKED THE POLICE FILES ON THE WAY HERE, AND IT SEEMS INTERPOL IS VERY INTERESTED IN SOME REPUTEDLY MYSTIC STATUES -- REPRESENTING THE FOUR ELEMENTS -- STOLEN FROM SEVERAL MUSEUMS AROUND THE GLOBE.
STATUES THAT LOOK REMARKABLY LIKE THESE IN YOUR BAG.
YOU... YOU CAN'T POSSIBLY MEAN...
THE CHARGE WOULD BE POSSESSION AND TRANSPORTATION OF STOLEN PROPERTY, AND PROBABLY GRAND THEFT, TOO. THAT SHOULD SEE YOU BEHIND BARS FOR SEVERAL YEARS!
OH, THE IGNOMINITY! BUT, AT LEAST TELL ME HOW YOU FOUND ME?
AS I BELIEVE A POPULAR SONG ONCE HAD IT, DIABLO, WE HAD A "LITTLE HELP FROM OUR FRIENDS."
A VERY SPECIAL FRIEND, A MASTER OF THE MYSTIC ARTS IN FACT, CALLED DR. STRANGE!
MY PLEASURE, PROFESSOR RICHARDS. I AM EVER PREPARED TO AID THE FANTASTIC FOUR.
THEN, WE'LL TAKE OUR GUEST, AND DEPART.
THANKS AGAIN, DOC. ANYTIME WE CAN DO YOU A FAVOR, JUST ASK!
THAT I SHALL, BEN GRIMM!
THO'TIS RARE THAT OUR PATHS CROSS IN THIS FASHION, IN OUR SEPARATE WAYS WE BOTH BATTLE A COMMON FOE.
NOR SHALL THAT BATTLE TRULY END, SO LONG AS MEN LIKE DIABLO SEEK TO TURN THE WORLD'S NATURAL ORDER TO THEIR OWN EVIL PURPOSES!
READ THE FURTHER ADVENTURES OF EARTH'S SORCERER SUPREME EVERY SIXTY DAYS IN "DOCTOR STRANGE"
NEXT ISSUE: MISSION FOR A DEAD MAN
THE TORCH FIGHTS ALONE TO CLEAR A MURDERER'S NAME. 'NUFF SAID!

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MISSION FOR A DEAD MAN!

Reed Richards! Ben Grimm! Sue Richards! Johnny Storm! Together they braved the unknown terrors of outer space and were changed into something more than human! MR. FANTASTIC! THE THING! THE INVISIBLE GIRL! THE HUMAN TORCH! And now the world will never again be the same!

Stan Lee PRESENTS: THE FANTASTIC FOUR!®

STORY AND ART JOHN BYRNE / LETTERING JIM NOVAK / COLORING GLYNIS WEIN / EDITING JIM SALICRUP / EDITOR-IN-CHIEF JIM SHOOTER

MISSION FOR A DEAD MAN!

THE NAME OVER THE GATE READS "DEEDEN STATE CORRECTIONAL FACILITY;" A MISNOMER DATING TO AN EARLIER TIME.

IT HAS BEEN COMPARED TO ALCATRAZ, TO SING SING, TO A HUNDRED OTHER HELLHOLES THAT MEN, BY THE ACTION OF THEIR LIVES, HAVE COMMITTED THEMSELVES.

THERE ARE FEW LIVING WHO HAVE HEARD OF DEEDEN. THIS IS NOT SURPRISING. LEGENDS RARELY GROW AROUND PLACES SUCH AS THIS.

LEGENDS GROW ONLY WHEN THERE ARE MEN TO TELL THEM, AND THE BRAND OF "CORRECTION" PRACTICED AT DEEDEN HAS THAT IRREVOCABLE FINALITY THAT PREVENTS SUCH STORYTELLING.

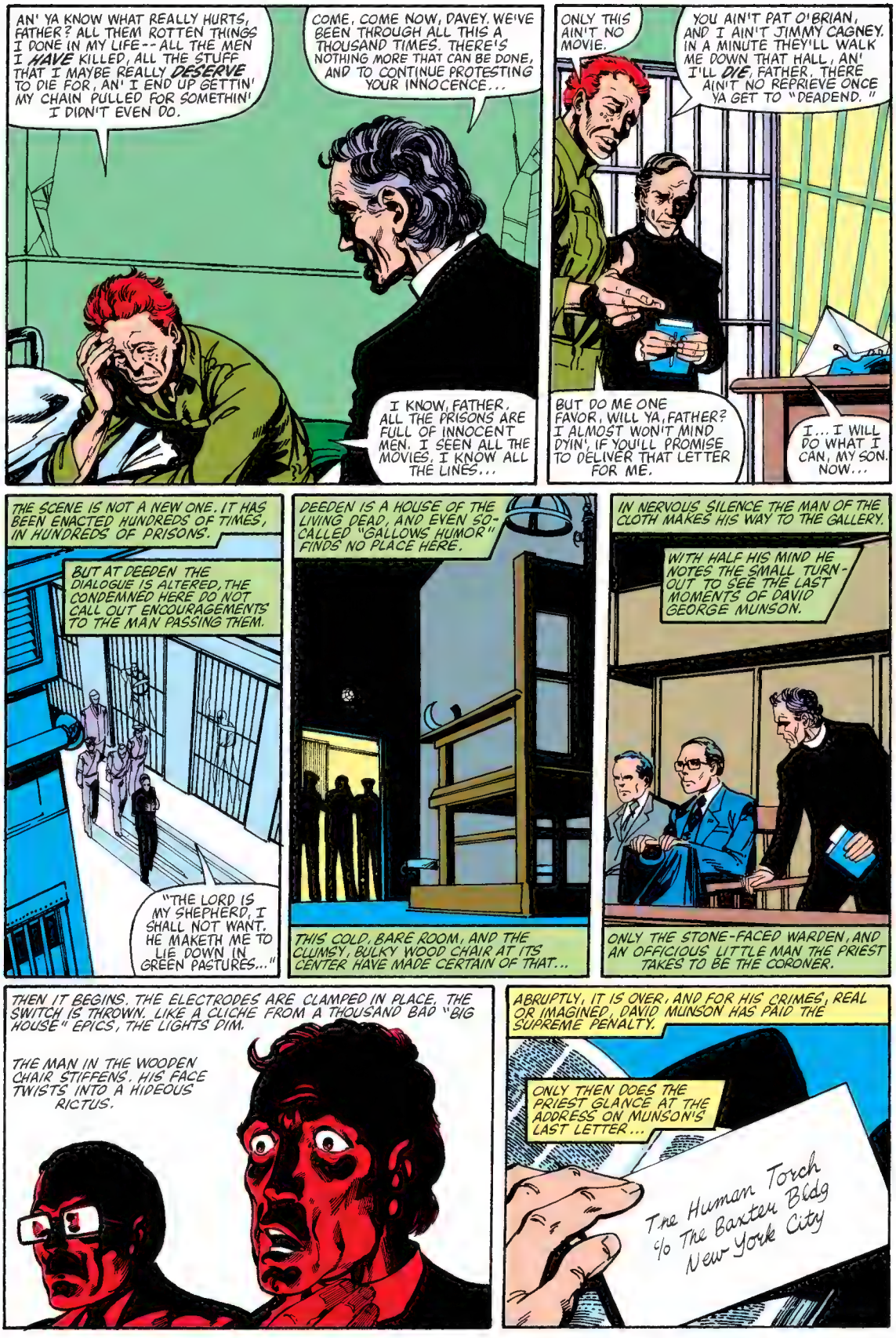
IN FIFTY-SEVEN YEARS NO ONE HAS EVER ESCAPED THE PRISON SOMETIMES NICKNAMED "DEADEND." NO INMATE LEAVES THE WALLS OF DEEDEN ALIVE.

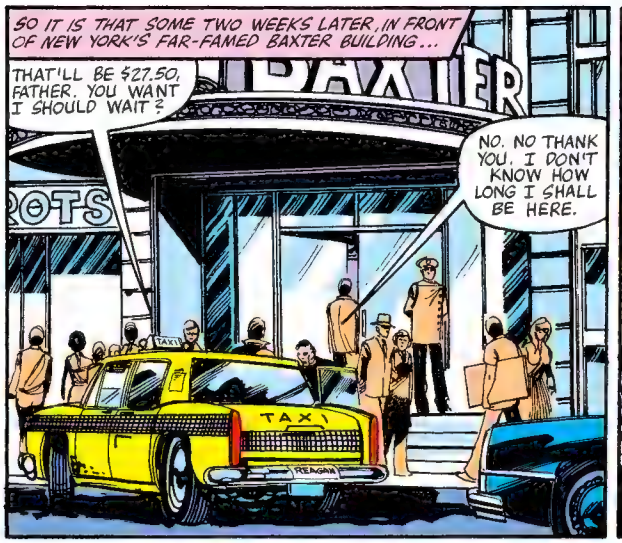
CASE IN POINT, ONE GEORGE DAVID MUNSON, INMATE OF THE LAST CELL ON DEATH ROW, AWAITING HIS RENDEZVOUS WITH ETERNITY.

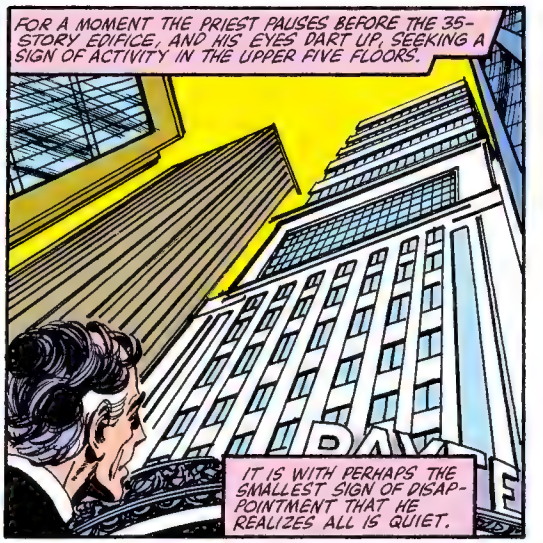
HIS CRIME -- THE DELIBERATE KILLING OF A HUMAN BEING IN FURTHERANCE OF THEFT.

COME ALONG NOW, DAVEY. IT'S TIME TO GO.

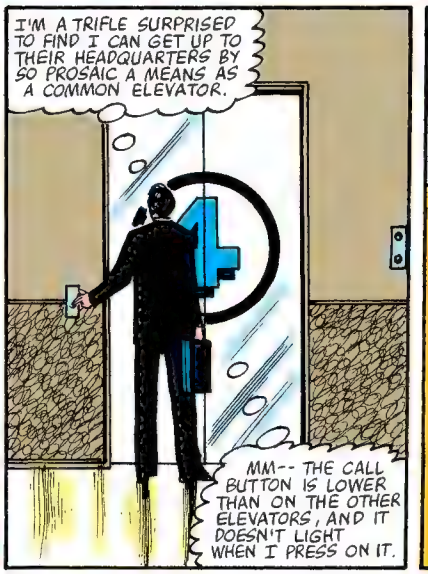
YEH, I KNOW, FATHER. OH, HOW I KNOW!

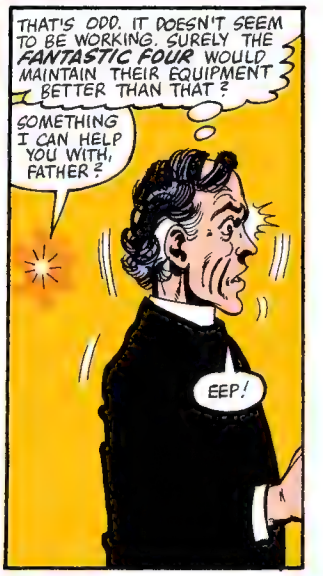

AN' YA KNOW WHAT REALLY HURTS, FATHER? ALL THEM ROTTEN THINGS I DONE IN MY LIFE--ALL THE MEN I HAVE KILLED, ALL THE STUFF THAT I MAYBE REALLY DESERVE TO DIE FOR, AN' I END UP GETTIN' MY CHAIN PULLED FOR SOMETHIN' I DIDN'T EVEN DO.
COME, COME NOW, DAVEY. WE'VE BEEN THROUGH ALL THIS A THOUSAND TIMES. THERE'S NOTHING MORE THAT CAN BE DONE, AND TO CONTINUE PROTESTING YOUR INNOCENCE...
I KNOW, FATHER. ALL THE PRISONS ARE FULL OF INNOCENT MEN. I SEEN ALL THE MOVIES. I KNOW ALL THE LINES...
ONLY THIS AIN'T NO MOVIE.
YOU AIN'T PAT O'BRIAN, AND I AIN'T JIMMY CAGNEY. IN A MINUTE THEY'LL WALK ME DOWN THAT HALL, AN' I'LL DIE, FATHER. THERE AIN'T NO REPRIEVE ONCE YA GET TO "DEADEND."
BUT DO ME ONE FAVOR, WILL YA, FATHER? I ALMOST WON'T MIND DYIN', IF YOU'LL PROMISE TO DELIVER THAT LETTER FOR ME.
I... I WILL DO WHAT I CAN, MY SON. NOW...
THE SCENE IS NOT A NEW ONE. IT HAS BEEN ENACTED HUNDREDS OF TIMES, IN HUNDREDS OF PRISONS.
BUT AT DEEDEN THE DIALOGUE IS ALTERED. THE CONDEMNED HERE DO NOT CALL OUT ENCOURAGEMENTS TO THE MAN PASSING THEM.
"THE LORD IS MY SHEPHERD, I SHALL NOT WANT. HE MAKETH ME TO LIE DOWN IN GREEN PASTURES..."
DEEDEN IS A HOUSE OF THE LIVING DEAD, AND EVEN SO-CALLED "GALLOWS HUMOR" FINDS NO PLACE HERE.
THIS COLD, BARE ROOM, AND THE CLUMSY, BULKY WOOD CHAIR AT ITS CENTER HAVE MADE CERTAIN OF THAT...
IN NERVOUS SILENCE THE MAN OF THE CLOTH MAKES HIS WAY TO THE GALLERY.
WITH HALF HIS MIND HE NOTES THE SMALL TURN-OUT TO SEE THE LAST MOMENTS OF DAVID GEORGE MUNSON.
ONLY THE STONE-FACED WARDEN, AND AN OFFICIOUS LITTLE MAN THE PRIEST TAKES TO BE THE CORONER.
THEN IT BEGINS. THE ELECTRODES ARE CLAMPED IN PLACE, THE SWITCH IS THROWN. LIKE A CLICHE FROM A THOUSAND BAD "BIG HOUSE" EPICS, THE LIGHTS DIM.
THE MAN IN THE WOODEN CHAIR STIFFENS. HIS FACE TWISTS INTO A HIDEOUS RICTUS.
ABRUPTLY, IT IS OVER, AND FOR HIS CRIMES, REAL OR IMAGINED, DAVID MUNSON HAS PAID THE SUPREME PENALTY.
ONLY THEN DOES THE PRIEST GLANCE AT THE ADDRESS ON MUNSON'S LAST LETTER...
The Human Torch
c/o The Baxter Bldg
New York City


SO IT IS THAT SOME TWO WEEKS LATER, IN FRONT OF NEW YORK'S FAR-FAMED BAXTER BUILDING...
THAT'LL BE $27.50, FATHER. YOU WANT I SHOULD WAIT?
NO. NO THANK YOU. I DON'T KNOW HOW LONG I SHALL BE HERE.
TAXI


FOR A MOMENT THE PRIEST PAUSES BEFORE THE 35-STORY EDIFICE, AND HIS EYES DART UP, SEEKING A SIGN OF ACTIVITY IN THE UPPER FIVE FLOORS.
IT IS WITH PERHAPS THE SMALLEST SIGN OF DISAPPOINTMENT THAT HE REALIZES ALL IS QUIET.

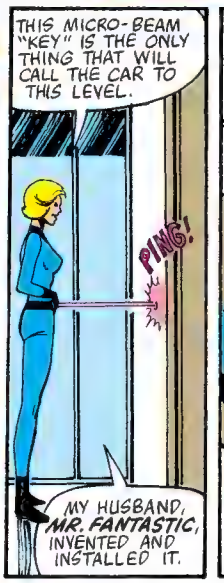
AND SO, WITH A NERVOUS TUG AT THE STARCHED WHITE OF HIS OFFICE, HE ENTERS THE BUSTLING LOBBY...
IT'S SO...NORMAL! I DON'T REALLY KNOW WHAT I EXPECTED...
...BUT IF A TENTH OF WHAT I'VE READ ABOUT THE FANTASTIC FOUR IS TRUE...


I'M A TRIFLE SURPRISED TO FIND I CAN GET UP TO THEIR HEADQUARTERS BY SO PROSAIC A MEANS AS A COMMON ELEVATOR.
MM-- THE CALL BUTTON IS LOWER THAN ON THE OTHER ELEVATORS, AND IT DOESN'T LIGHT WHEN I PRESS ON IT.

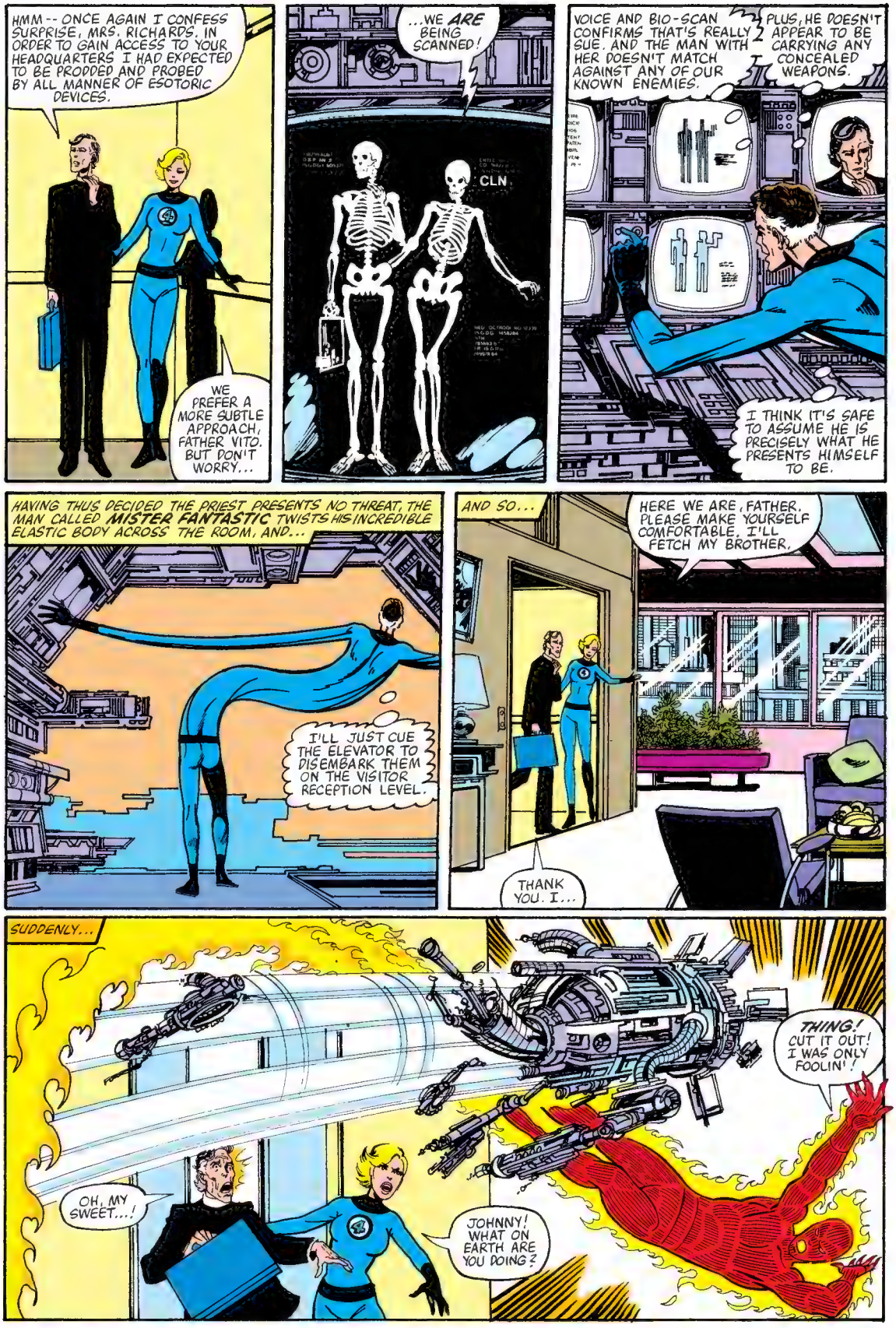

THAT'S ODD. IT DOESN'T SEEM TO BE WORKING. SURELY THE FANTASTIC FOUR WOULD MAINTAIN THEIR EQUIPMENT BETTER THAN THAT?
SOMETHING I CAN HELP YOU WITH, FATHER?
EEP!

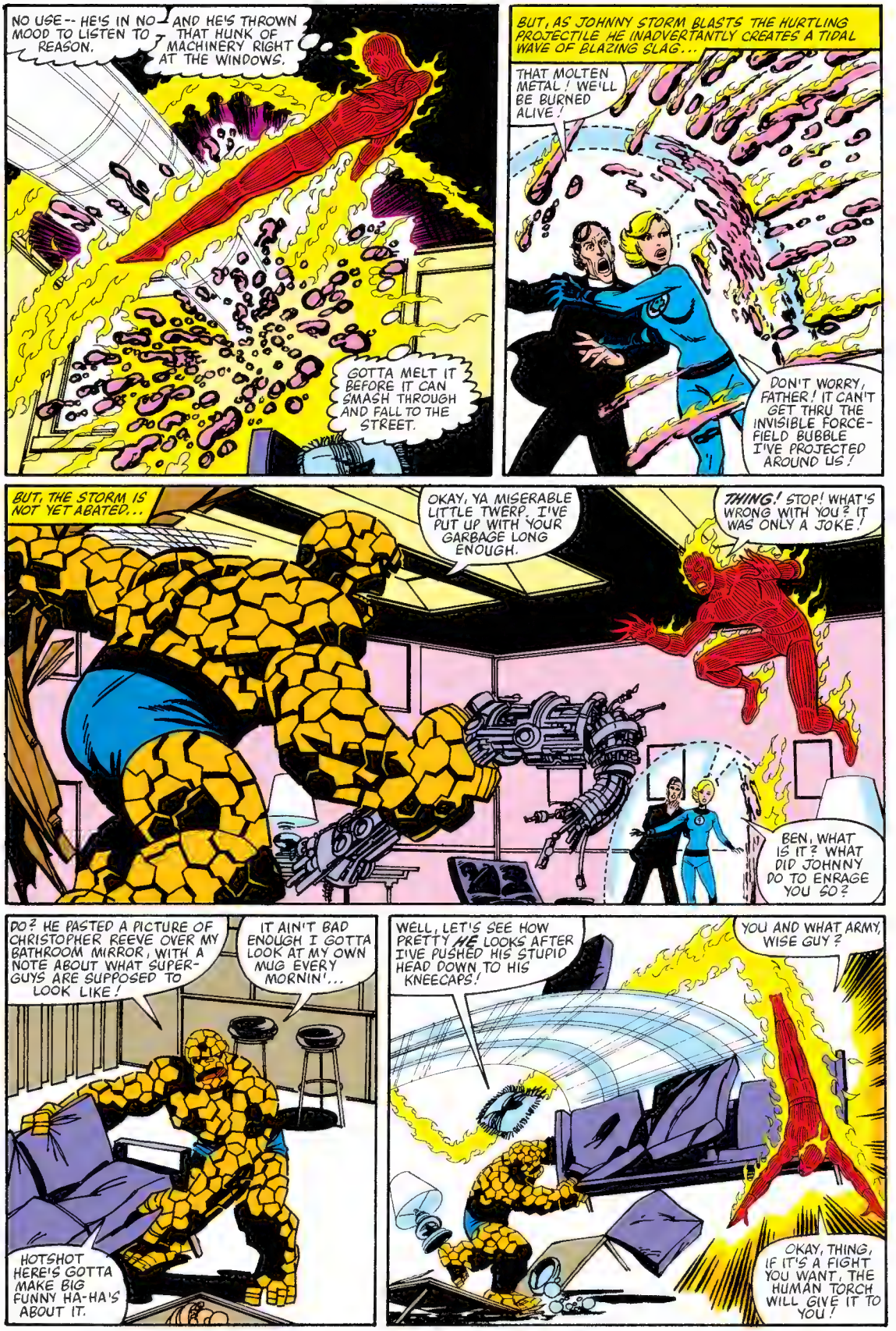
OH--SORRY I STARTLED YOU, FATHER. I'M AFRAID I'D QUITE FORGOTTEN I WAS STILL INVISIBLE. THERE, IS THAT BETTER? I'M...
SUSAN RICHARDS --THE INVISIBLE GIRL!
I...I, ER HAVE A LETTER FOR YOUR BROTHER, BUT YOUR ELEVATOR SEEMS TO BE OUT OF ORDER.

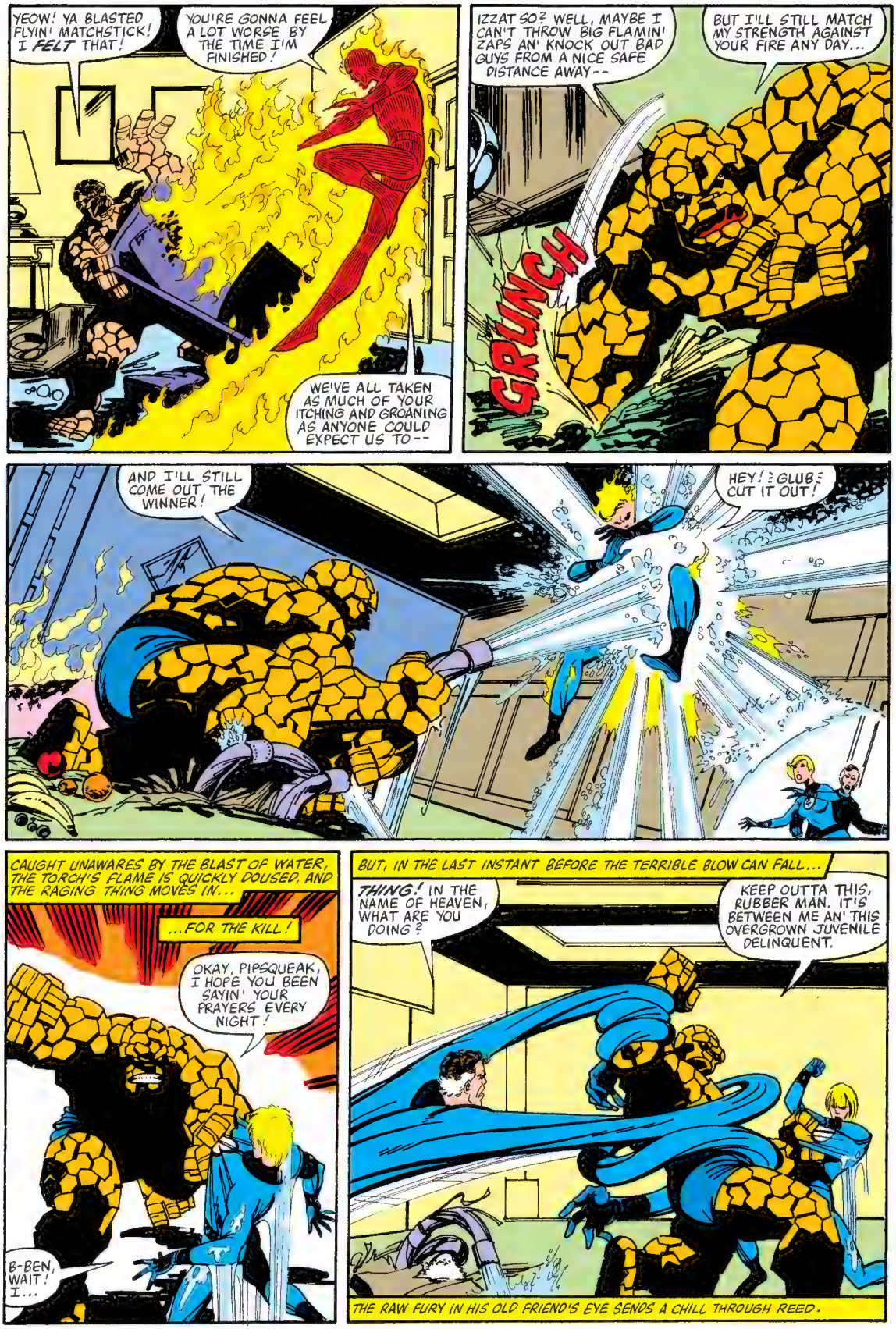
NOT AT ALL, FATHER. IT'S JUST THAT YOU DON'T HAVE A SPECIAL BELT-BUCKLE SOLENOID, LIKE WE MEMBERS OF THE FF DO.

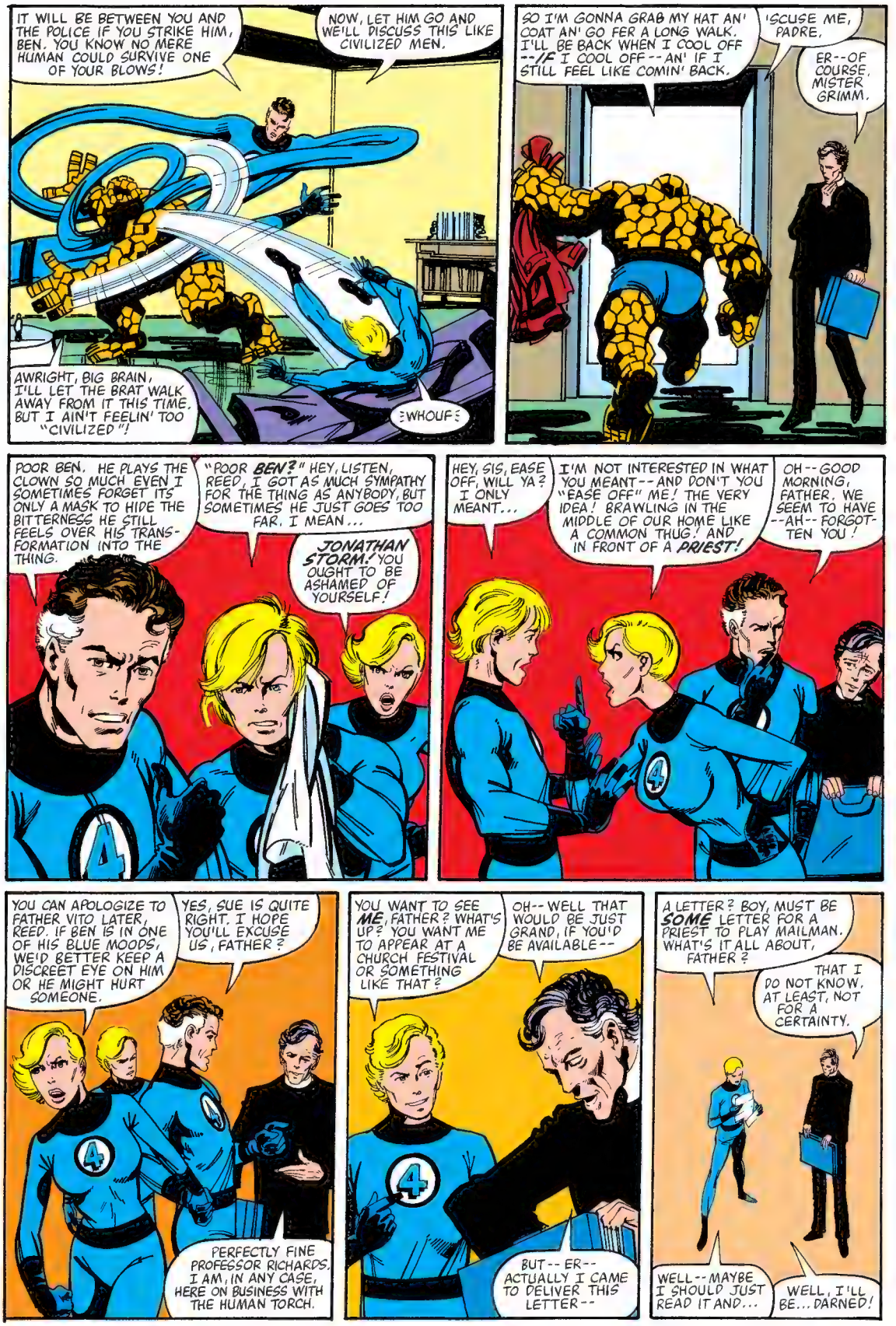

THIS MICRO-BEAM "KEY" IS THE ONLY THING THAT WILL CALL THE CAR TO THIS LEVEL.
PING!
MY HUSBAND, MR. FANTASTIC, INVENTED AND INSTALLED IT.

HE'D CONSIDERED SOMETHING KEYED TO OUR FINGERPRINTS, BUT THE THING HAS NO FINGERPRINTS.
AFTER YOU, FATHER... ER, FATHER...?
VITO. FATHER ALBERT VITO. THANK YOU.

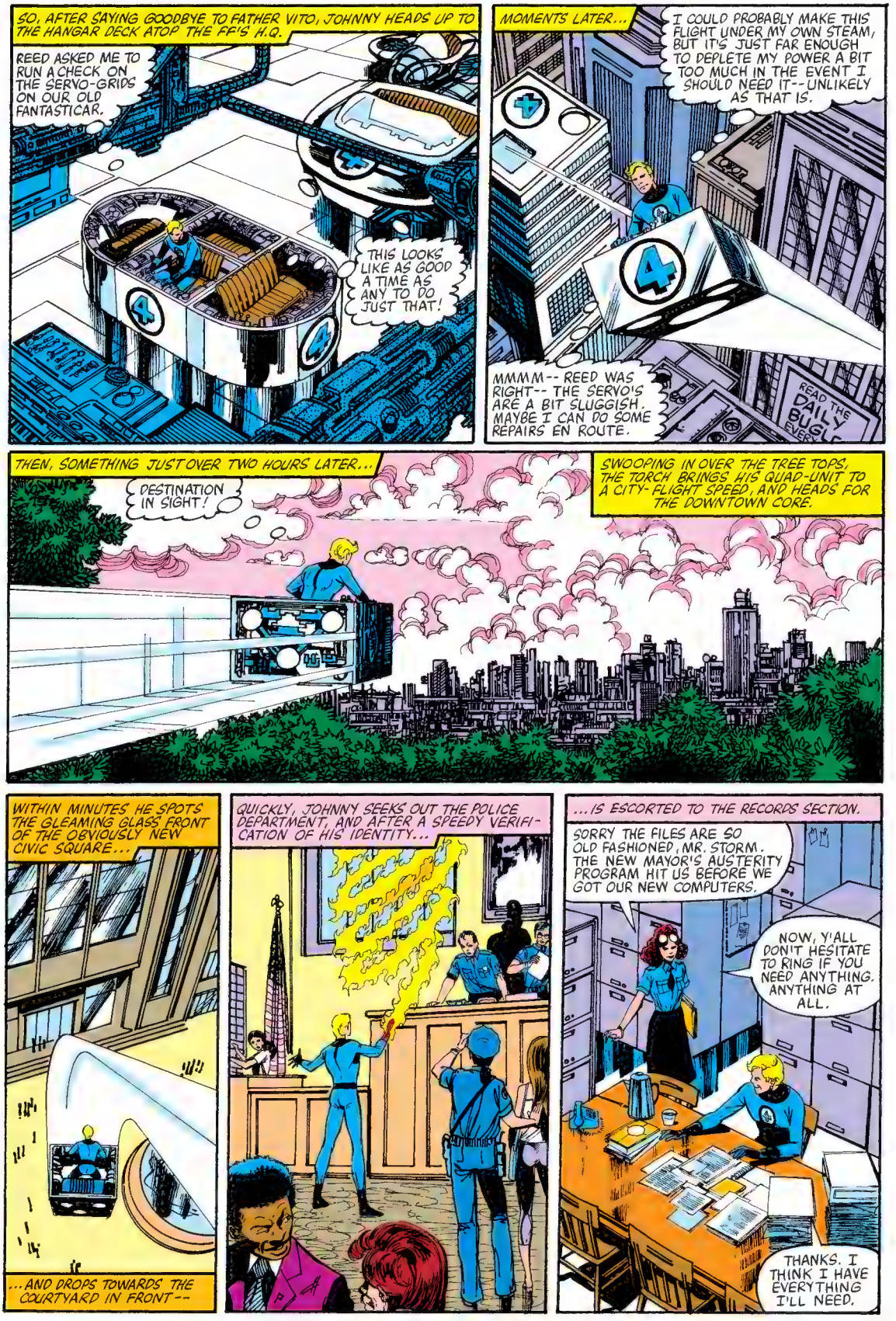

HMM -- ONCE AGAIN I CONFESS SURPRISE, MRS. RICHARDS. IN ORDER TO GAIN ACCESS TO YOUR HEADQUARTERS I HAD EXPECTED TO BE PRODDED AND PROBED BY ALL MANNER OF ESOTORIC DEVICES.
WE PREFER A MORE SUBTLE APPROACH, FATHER VITO. BUT DON'T WORRY...
...WE ARE BEING SCANNED!
CLN
VOICE AND BIO-SCAN CONFIRMS THAT'S REALLY SUE. AND THE MAN WITH HER DOESN'T MATCH AGAINST ANY OF OUR KNOWN ENEMIES.
PLUS, HE DOESN'T APPEAR TO BE CARRYING ANY CONCEALED WEAPONS.
I THINK IT'S SAFE TO ASSUME HE IS PRECISELY WHAT HE PRESENTS HIMSELF TO BE.
HAVING THUS DECIDED THE PRIEST PRESENTS NO THREAT, THE MAN CALLED MISTER FANTASTIC TWISTS HIS INCREDIBLE ELASTIC BODY ACROSS THE ROOM, AND...
I'LL JUST CUE THE ELEVATOR TO DISEMBARK THEM ON THE VISITOR RECEPTION LEVEL.
AND SO...
HERE WE ARE, FATHER. PLEASE MAKE YOURSELF COMFORTABLE. I'LL FETCH MY BROTHER.
THANK YOU. I...
SUDDENLY...
THING! CUT IT OUT! I WAS ONLY FOOLIN'!
OH, MY SWEET...!
JOHNNY! WHAT ON EARTH ARE YOU DOING?


NO USE-- HE'S IN NO MOOD TO LISTEN TO REASON.
AND HE'S THROWN THAT HUNK OF MACHINERY RIGHT AT THE WINDOWS.
GOTTA MELT IT BEFORE IT CAN SMASH THROUGH AND FALL TO THE STREET.
BUT, AS JOHNNY STORM BLASTS THE HURTLING PROJECTILE HE INADVERTANTLY CREATES A TIDAL WAVE OF BLAZING SLAG...
THAT MOLTEN METAL! WE'LL BE BURNED ALIVE!
DON'T WORRY, FATHER! IT CAN'T GET THRU THE INVISIBLE FORCE-FIELD BUBBLE I'VE PROJECTED AROUND US!
BUT, THE STORM IS NOT YET ABATED...
OKAY, YA MISERABLE LITTLE TWERP. I'VE PUT UP WITH YOUR GARBAGE LONG ENOUGH.
THING! STOP! WHAT'S WRONG WITH YOU? IT WAS ONLY A JOKE!
BEN, WHAT IS IT? WHAT DID JOHNNY DO TO ENRAGE YOU SO?
DO? HE PASTED A PICTURE OF CHRISTOPHER REEVE OVER MY BATHROOM MIRROR, WITH A NOTE ABOUT WHAT SUPER-GUYS ARE SUPPOSED TO LOOK LIKE!
IT AIN'T BAD ENOUGH I GOTTA LOOK AT MY OWN MUG EVERY MORNIN'...
HOTSHOT HERE'S GOTTA MAKE BIG FUNNY HA-HA'S ABOUT IT.
WELL, LET'S SEE HOW PRETTY HE LOOKS AFTER I'VE PUSHED HIS STUPID HEAD DOWN TO HIS KNEECAPS!
YOU AND WHAT ARMY, WISE GUY?
OKAY, THING, IF IT'S A FIGHT YOU WANT, THE HUMAN TORCH WILL GIVE IT TO YOU!


YEOW! YA BLASTED FLYIN' MATCHSTICK! I FELT THAT!
YOU'RE GONNA FEEL A LOT WORSE BY THE TIME I'M FINISHED!
WE'VE ALL TAKEN AS MUCH OF YOUR ITCHING AND GROANING AS ANYONE COULD EXPECT US TO--
IZZAT SO? WELL, MAYBE I CAN'T THROW BIG FLAMIN' ZAPS AN' KNOCK OUT BAD GUYS FROM A NICE SAFE DISTANCE AWAY--
BUT I'LL STILL MATCH MY STRENGTH AGAINST YOUR FIRE ANY DAY...
GRUNCH
AND I'LL STILL COME OUT THE WINNER!
HEY! GLUB! CUT IT OUT!
CAUGHT UNAWARES BY THE BLAST OF WATER, THE TORCH'S FLAME IS QUICKLY DOUSED, AND THE RAGING THING MOVES IN...
...FOR THE KILL!
OKAY, PIPSQUEAK, I HOPE YOU BEEN SAYIN' YOUR PRAYERS EVERY NIGHT!
B-BEN, WAIT! I...
BUT, IN THE LAST INSTANT BEFORE THE TERRIBLE BLOW CAN FALL...
THING! IN THE NAME OF HEAVEN, WHAT ARE YOU DOING?
KEEP OUTTA THIS, RUBBER MAN. IT'S BETWEEN ME AN' THIS OVERGROWN JUVENILE DELINQUENT.
THE RAW FURY IN HIS OLD FRIEND'S EYE SENDS A CHILL THROUGH REED.

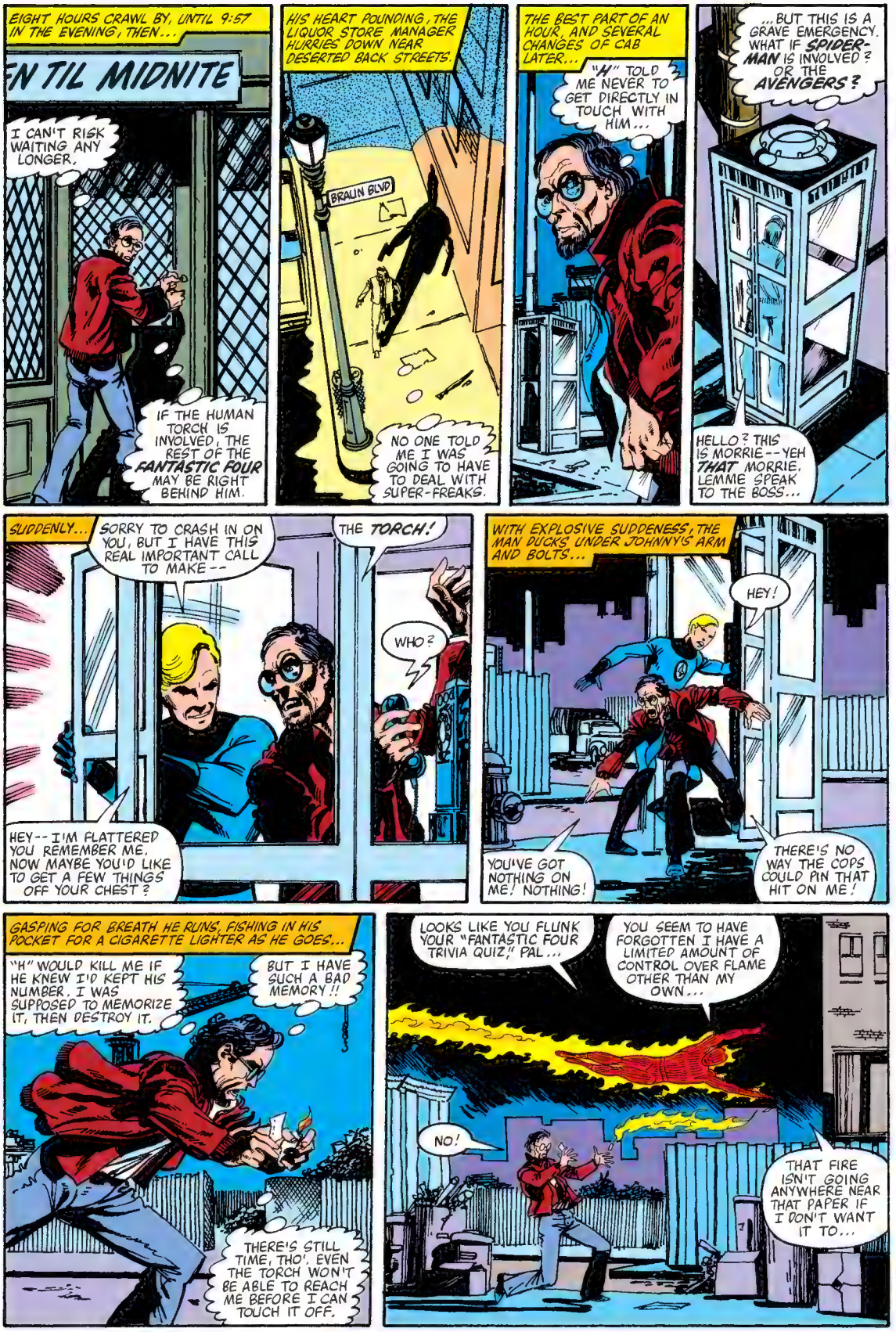

IT WILL BE BETWEEN YOU AND THE POLICE IF YOU STRIKE HIM, BEN. YOU KNOW NO MERE HUMAN COULD SURVIVE ONE OF YOUR BLOWS!
NOW, LET HIM GO AND WE'LL DISCUSS THIS LIKE CIVILIZED MEN.
AWRIGHT, BIG BRAIN, I'LL LET THE BRAT WALK AWAY FROM IT THIS TIME. BUT I AIN'T FEELIN' TOO "CIVILIZED"!
:WHOUF:
SO I'M GONNA GRAB MY HAT AN' COAT AN' GO FER A LONG WALK. I'LL BE BACK WHEN I COOL OFF --IF I COOL OFF -- AN' IF I STILL FEEL LIKE COMIN' BACK.
'SCUSE ME, PADRE.
ER--OF COURSE, MISTER GRIMM.
POOR BEN. HE PLAYS THE CLOWN SO MUCH EVEN I SOMETIMES FORGET IT'S ONLY A MASK TO HIDE THE BITTERNESS HE STILL FEELS OVER HIS TRANSFORMATION INTO THE THING.
"POOR BEN?" HEY, LISTEN, REED, I GOT AS MUCH SYMPATHY FOR THE THING AS ANYBODY, BUT SOMETIMES HE JUST GOES TOO FAR, I MEAN...
JONATHAN STORM! YOU OUGHT TO BE ASHAMED OF YOURSELF!
HEY, SIS, EASE OFF, WILL YA? I ONLY MEANT...
I'M NOT INTERESTED IN WHAT YOU MEANT -- AND DON'T YOU "EASE OFF" ME! THE VERY IDEA! BRAWLING IN THE MIDDLE OF OUR HOME LIKE A COMMON THUG! AND IN FRONT OF A PRIEST!
OH -- GOOD MORNING, FATHER. WE SEEM TO HAVE --AH-- FORGOTTEN YOU!
YOU CAN APOLOGIZE TO FATHER VITO LATER, REED. IF BEN IS IN ONE OF HIS BLUE MOODS, WE'D BETTER KEEP A DISCREET EYE ON HIM OR HE MIGHT HURT SOMEONE.
YES, SUE IS QUITE RIGHT. I HOPE YOU'LL EXCUSE US, FATHER?
PERFECTLY FINE PROFESSOR RICHARDS. I AM, IN ANY CASE, HERE ON BUSINESS WITH THE HUMAN TORCH.
YOU WANT TO SEE ME, FATHER? WHAT'S UP? YOU WANT ME TO APPEAR AT A CHURCH FESTIVAL OR SOMETHING LIKE THAT?
OH -- WELL THAT WOULD BE JUST GRAND, IF YOU'D BE AVAILABLE --
BUT -- ER -- ACTUALLY I CAME TO DELIVER THIS LETTER --
A LETTER? BOY, MUST BE SOME LETTER FOR A PRIEST TO PLAY MAILMAN. WHAT'S IT ALL ABOUT, FATHER?
THAT I DO NOT KNOW, AT LEAST, NOT FOR A CERTAINTY.
WELL -- MAYBE I SHOULD JUST READ IT AND...
WELL, I'LL BE... DARNED!

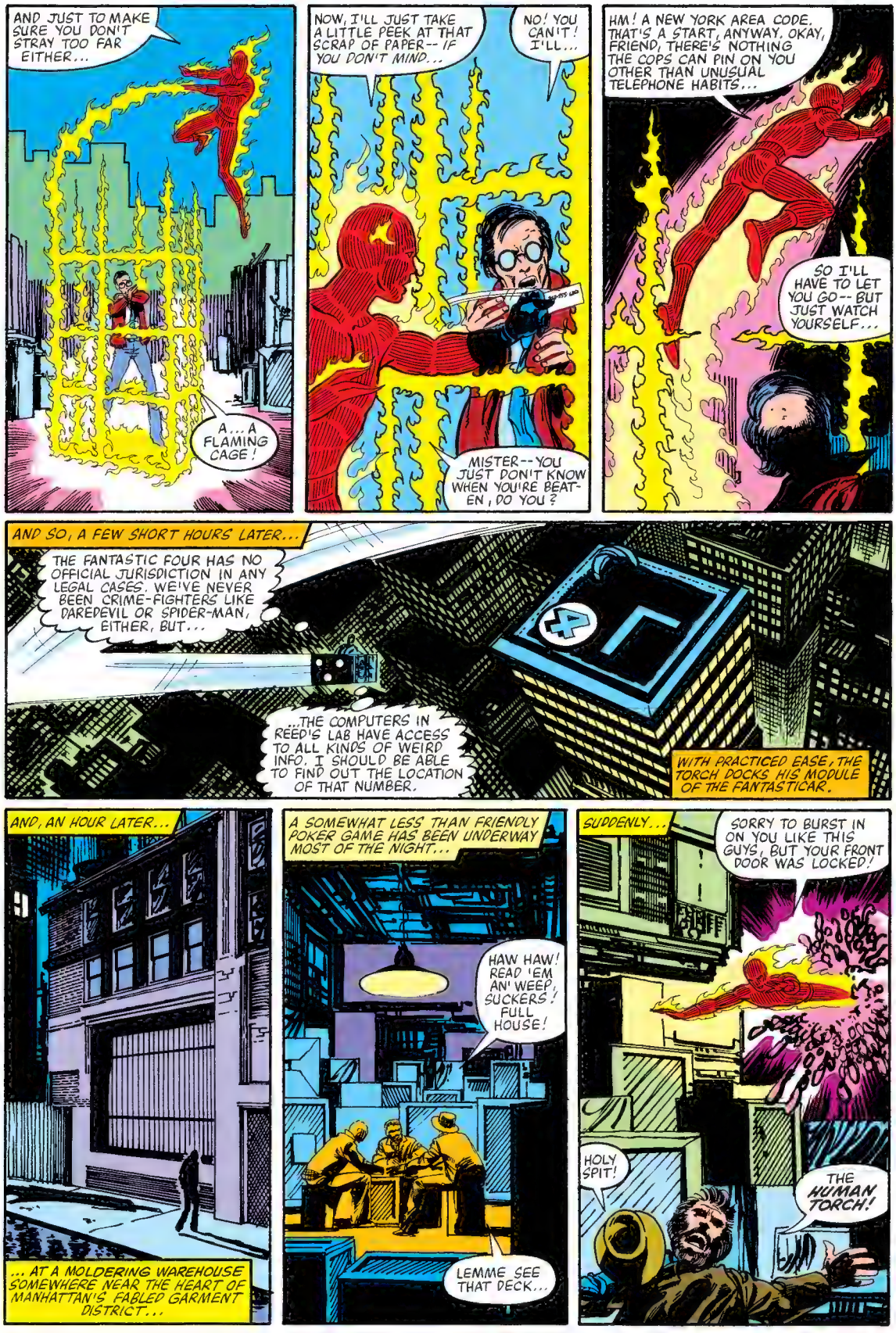
DSCF
STORM-- MAY 19, 1981
BY THE TIME YOU GET THIS I'LL BE DEAD. DON'T CRY NO TEARS FOR ME. I BEEN A LOUSE ALL MY LIFE AND NOW I'M PAYING MY DUES. BUT I WANT YOU SHOULD DO ME A FAVOR. MY OLD MA NEVER KNOWED WHAT A CRUM I BEEN. NOT UNTIL I GOT FRAMED FOR THIS KILLING WHAT I DIDN'T EVEN DO. SO IF YOU DON'T HOLD NO GRUDGE FROM HIGH SCHOOL SEE IF YOU CAN CLEAR MY NAME. NOT FOR ME, FOR MY MA.
David Ga
"DAVID GEORGE MUNSON?" I DON'T EVER RECALL KNOWING ANYONE NAMED MUNSON, FATHER.
HE SEEMED SURE HE KNEW YOU, MY SON. HE WAS ABOUT YOUR HEIGHT, WITH BRIGHT RED HAIR AND FRECKLES.
RED HAIR AND FRECKLES? I STILL DON'T THINK I... WAIT A MINUTE! IT COULDN'T BE...
JOHNNY'S MIND FLASHES BACK OVER THE YEARS.
"IT WAS IN MY JUNIOR YEAR AT GLENNVILLE HIGH, JUST BEFORE I BECAME THE TORCH..."
"FOR A REASON I NEVER LEARNED, I'D GOT ON THE WRONG SIDE OF A COUPLE OF THE LOCAL TOUGHS..."
"EVERY DAY BECAME A QUESTION OF HOW FAR I'D GET FROM SCHOOL BEFORE THEY STRUCK..."
JOHNNY!
WASSAMATTA, PRETTY BOY? HEY, GREG, YOU SEE THAT CLOWN KICK MY FOOT?
HE'S GONNA DO HIMSELF AN INJURY LIKE THAT, IF HE DON'T WATCH OUT, HUH GEORGIE?
"...YEAH-- I REMEMBER..."
IT WAS "GEORGIE" BACK THEN, NOT "DAVID GEORGE", BUT THAT'S THE ONLY RED-HEAD I KNOW FROM SCHOOL WHO'D THINK I MIGHT HOLD A GRUDGE.
AND NOW HE'S DEAD, FATHER?
JUST OVER TWO WEEKS AGO, ON MAY 20TH. WHAT DO YOU THINK YOU WILL DO?
WELL-- I ALWAYS WAS A SUCKER FOR A SOB STORY, FATHER!
GUESS I'LL HAVE A NOSE 'ROUND AND SEE WHAT I CAN TURN UP.
I'M GLAD TO HEAR IT, MY SON. ANYTHING I CAN DO TO HELP, ANY INFORMATION YOU MIGHT NEED, DON'T HESITATE TO ASK...

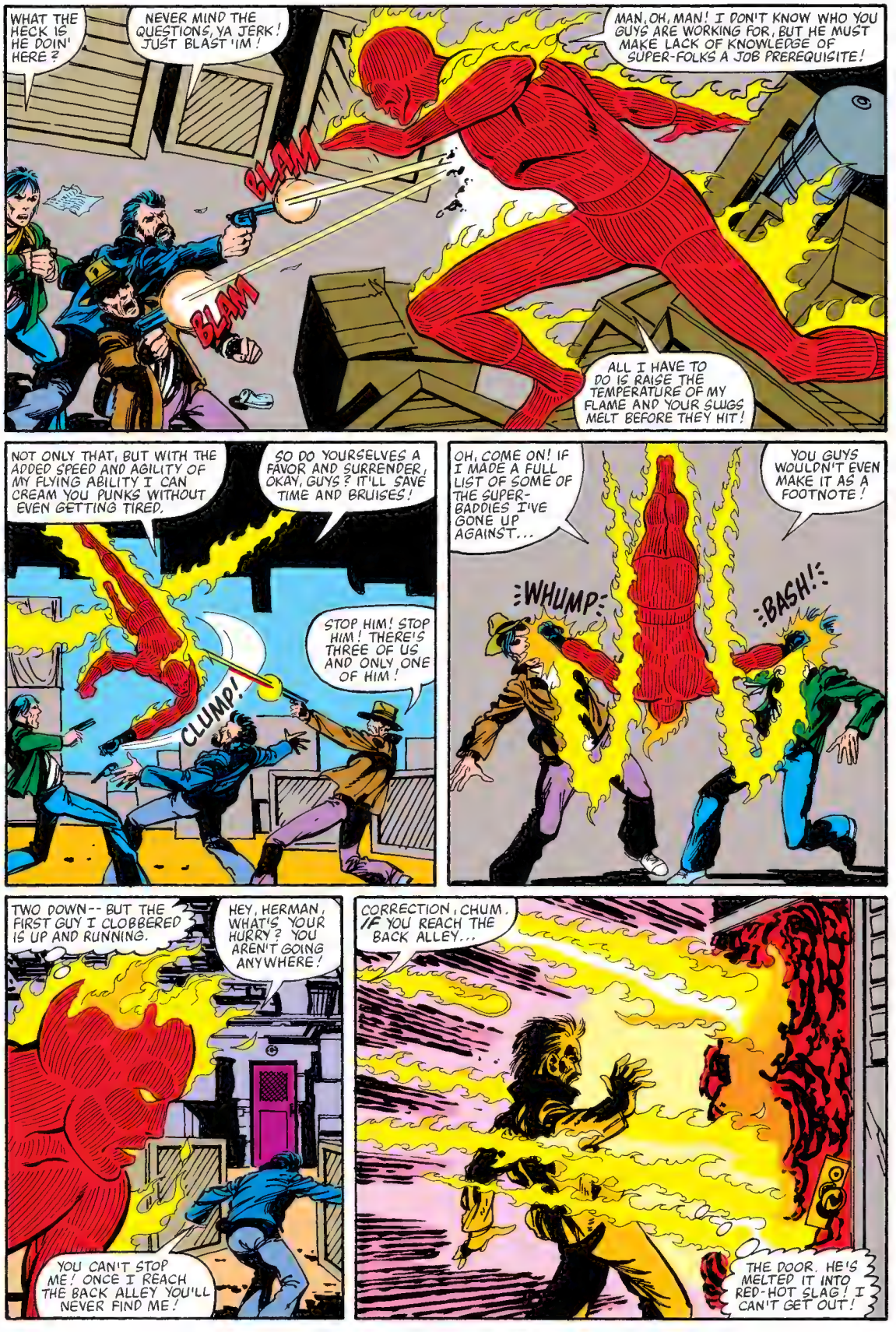

SO, AFTER SAYING GOODBYE TO FATHER VITO, JOHNNY HEADS UP TO THE HANGAR DECK ATOP THE FF'S H.Q.
REED ASKED ME TO RUN A CHECK ON THE SERVO-GRIDS ON OUR OLD FANTASTICAR.
THIS LOOKS LIKE AS GOOD A TIME AS ANY TO DO JUST THAT!
MOMENTS LATER...
I COULD PROBABLY MAKE THIS FLIGHT UNDER MY OWN STEAM, BUT IT'S JUST FAR ENOUGH TO DEPLETE MY POWER A BIT TOO MUCH IN THE EVENT I SHOULD NEED IT--UNLIKELY AS THAT IS.
MMMM-- REED WAS RIGHT-- THE SERVO'S ARE A BIT SLUGGISH. MAYBE I CAN DO SOME REPAIRS EN ROUTE.
READ THE DAILY BUGLE
THEN, SOMETHING JUST OVER TWO HOURS LATER...
DESTINATION IN SIGHT!
SWOOPING IN OVER THE TREE TOPS, THE TORCH BRINGS HIS QUAD-UNIT TO A CITY-FLIGHT SPEED, AND HEADS FOR THE DOWNTOWN CORE.
WITHIN MINUTES HE SPOTS THE GLEAMING GLASS FRONT OF THE OBVIOUSLY NEW CIVIC SQUARE...
...AND DROPS TOWARDS THE COURTYARD IN FRONT--
QUICKLY, JOHNNY SEEKS OUT THE POLICE DEPARTMENT, AND AFTER A SPEEDY VERIFICATION OF HIS IDENTITY...
...IS ESCORTED TO THE RECORDS SECTION.
SORRY THE FILES ARE SO OLD FASHIONED, MR. STORM. THE NEW MAYOR'S AUSTERITY PROGRAM HIT US BEFORE WE GOT OUR NEW COMPUTERS.
NOW, Y'ALL DON'T HESITATE TO RING IF YOU NEED ANYTHING. ANYTHING AT ALL.
THANKS. I THINK I HAVE EVERYTHING I'LL NEED.

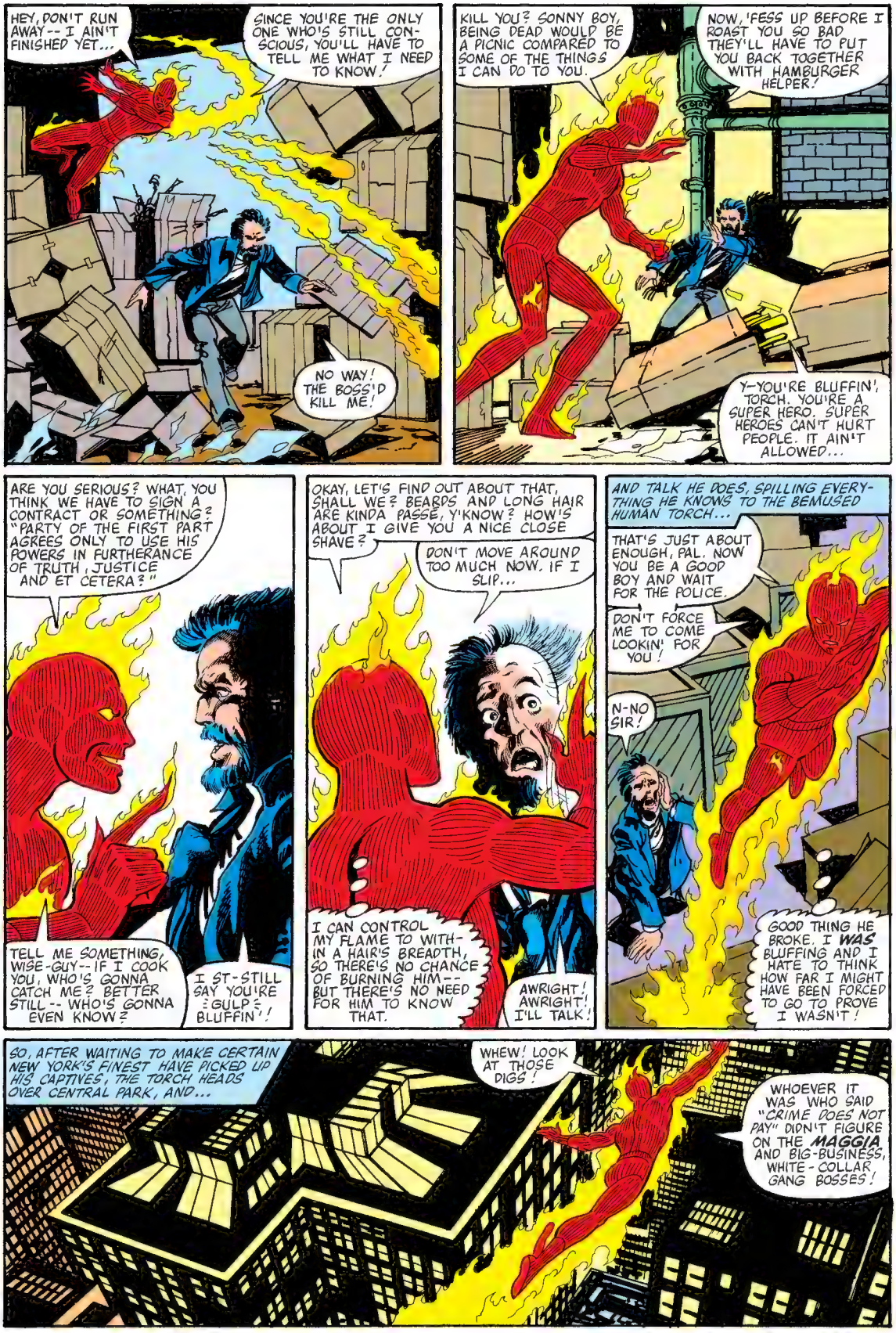
LEFT ON HIS OWN AT LAST, JOHNNY BEGINS TO READ THE PIECED-TOGETHER DETAILS OF A WINTER'S NIGHT TWO YEARS AGO...
BOY--NO GLOVES, FINGERPRINTS ALL OVER THE MURDER WEAPON--AND HE COULDN'T HAVE HAD ANY MORE EYE-WITNESSES TO HIS ESCAPE IF HE'D HAD THE WHOLE THING CATERED.
YEP, IT'S JUST DUMB ENOUGH TO HAVE BEEN OUR OL' PAL GEORGIE.
BUT THERE'S ONE DETAIL THAT TROUBLES ME...
AND SO, AS THE TORCH SEEKS OUT THE OFFICER WHO INVESTIGATED THE CRIME...
IT'S THE SILENCER THAT BOTHERS ME, SERGEANT. MUNSON WAS DUMB ENOUGH TO PULL THE CRIME--BUT A SILENCER IS JUST TOO SUBTLE.
YEAH, I KNOW WHAT YOU MEAN. IT BUGGED ME AT THE TIME, BUT YOUR BOY MUNSON WAS A TRANSIENT...
AS NEAR AS WE CAN FIGURE, HE'D ONLY BEEN IN TOWN A FEW DAYS. NO ONE KNEW HIM WELL ENOUGH TO SAY IF HE WAS SMART ENOUGH OR NOT TO USE A SILENCER.
TELL YA SOMETHING ELSE THAT BUGGED ME. HE ADMITTED TO THE ROBBERY, BUT NOT THE KILLING. THAT NEVER MADE SENSE.
WELL, IF YOU'VE NO OBJECTIONS, I'M GONNA HAVE A LOOK AROUND AND SEE IF I CAN DIG ANYTHING UP.
TWO YEARS AFTER THE FACT? GOOD LUCK!!

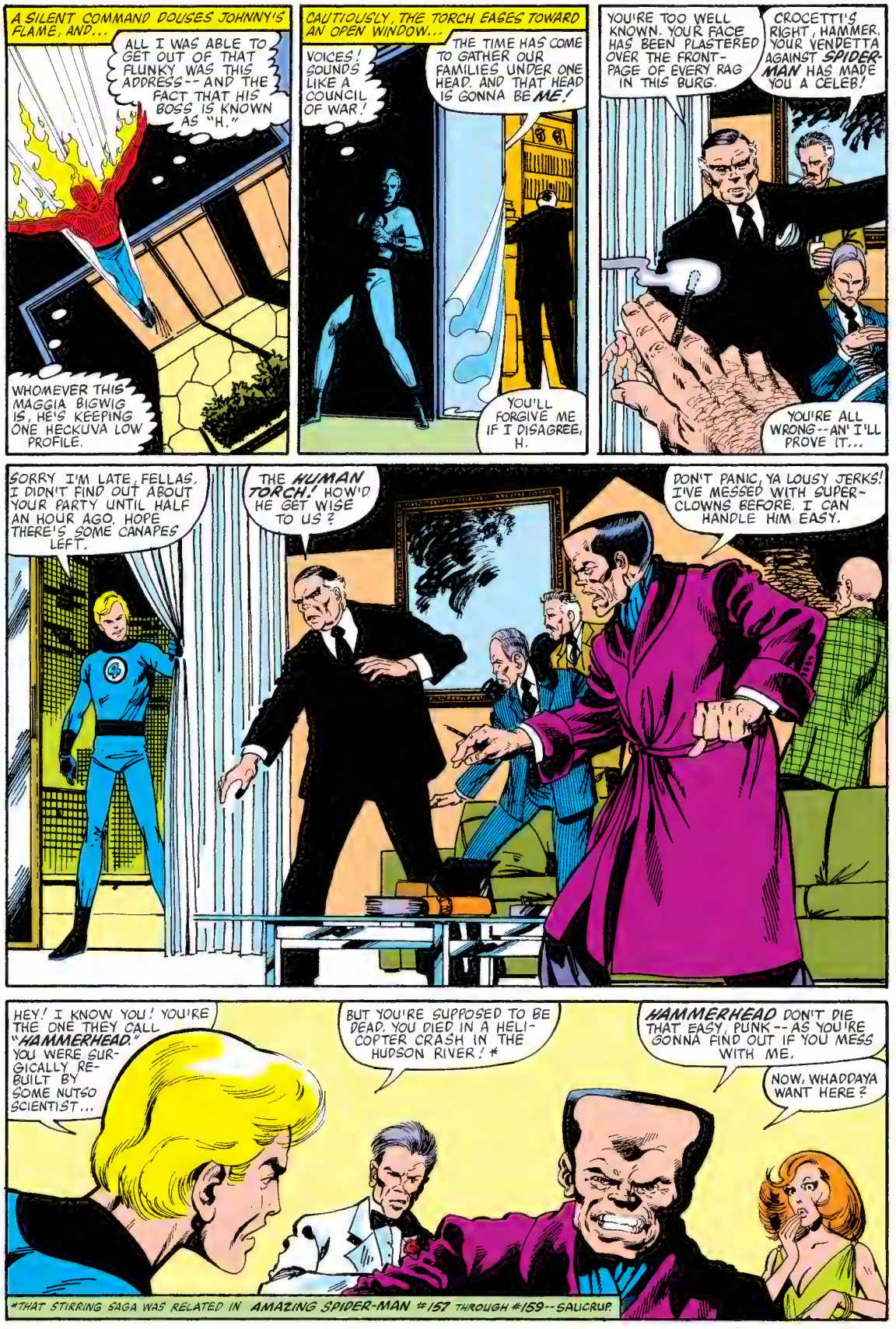
FORTY MINUTES LATER...
I CAN'T SHAKE THE FEELING THE WHOLE THING SMELLS FUNNY. WOULD EVEN A WORLD-CLASS BOZO LIKE MUNSON PULL A JOB WHEN THERE MIGHT BE WITNESSES AROUND?
BUT, IF HE WAS FRAMED, BY WHO? AND WHY?
LIQUORS
WELL--HERE'S THE LIQUOR STORE.
BOY--LOOK AT THIS PLACE! YOU'D NEVER KNOW A MURDER HAPPENED... BUT THEN WHAT DID I EXPECT? CHALK OUTLINES ON THE FLOOR?
GOOD MORNING, SIR. MY NAME IS JOHNNY STORM --PERHAPS YOU'VE HEARD OF ME--THE HUMAN TORCH? I'M LOOKING INTO A CRIME THAT WAS COMMITTED HERE.
THE HUMAN TORCH! RIGHT HERE IN MY STORE!
MISTER STORM, I'M HONORED!
THEN YOU DON'T MIND IF I HAVE A LOOK AROUND?
THE OWNER CONSENTS AND JOHNNY WANDERS THE AISLES LOOKING FOR...
WHAT? WHAT AM I LOOKING FOR? CLUES? SHERLOCK HOLMES I AIN'T. BESIDES, THE COPS WOULD HAVE GONE OVER THIS JOINT WITH A FINE-TOOTH COMB!
HMM... THE BACK ROOM THE MURDER VICTIM CAME OUT OF SHOULD BE AROUND HERE SOMEWHERE.
HERE IT IS. HM. JUST A STOCKROOM. WHAT WAS THE OWNER DOING BACK HERE, WITH THE STORE ALL CLOSED UP AND THE LIGHTS OUT?
HEY! THAT ROOM IS FOR EMPLOYEES ONLY!
SORRY, BUT YOU SAID I COULD...
I DIDN'T SAY YOU COULD GO POKING YOUR NOSE WHERE IT DON'T BELONG. WHO ARE YOU ANYWAY?
I DON'T THINK YOU ARE THE HUMAN TORCH. I THINK YOU'RE A SNOOPY COP!
NOT THE HUMAN TORCH? MISTER, YOU JUST PUSHED ALL THE WRONG BUTTONS!
FLAME ON!
YAH!!
HOLY COW! HE CAUGHT ON FIRE!
YOU YOUNG PUNK! GET OUT OF MY STORE! YOU COME IN MAKING TROUBLE! YOU SCARE MY CUSTOMERS! GET OUT BEFORE I CALL A COP!
BLAST! HE'S GOT ME DEAD TO RIGHTS. I HAD NO BUSINESS FLAMING ON WITH ALL THIS FLAMMABLE BOOZE AROUND.
AND I HAVE NO OFFICIAL JURISDICTION. IF HE DOES CALL A COP...
...HE'D BE WITHIN HIS RIGHTS TO CHARGE ME WITH PUBLIC MISCHIEF...
ALL RIGHT--SO I'LL LEAVE. BUT I STILL THINK SOMETHING'S ROTTEN IN DENMARK...
LIQUORS
...AND YOU CAN BET YOUR BEST HAT I AIN'T DONE YET!

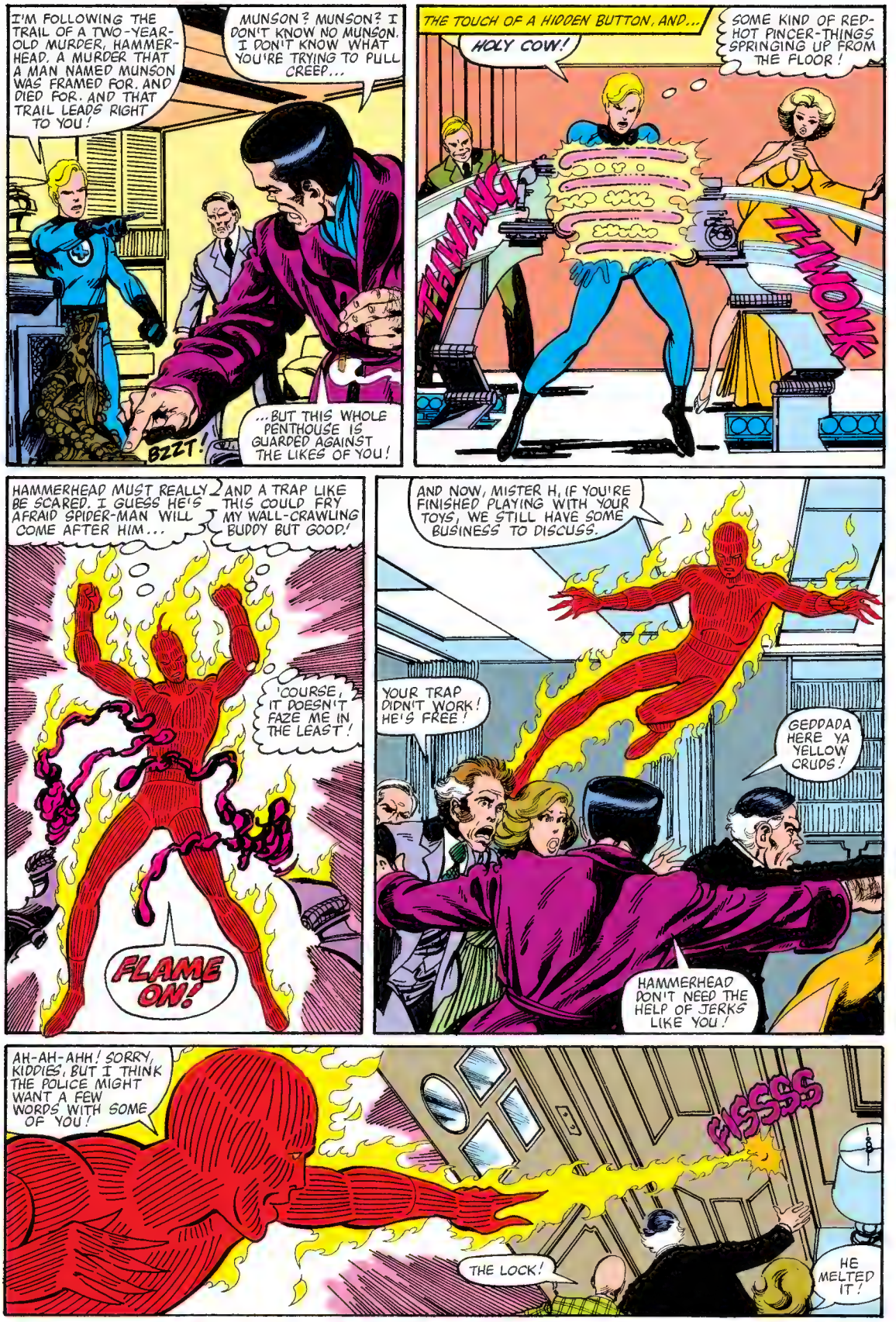

EIGHT HOURS CRAWL BY, UNTIL 9:57 IN THE EVENING, THEN...
-N TIL MIDNITE
I CAN'T RISK WAITING ANY LONGER.
IF THE HUMAN TORCH IS INVOLVED, THE REST OF THE FANTASTIC FOUR MAY BE RIGHT BEHIND HIM.
HIS HEART POUNDING, THE LIQUOR STORE MANAGER HURRIES DOWN NEAR DESERTED BACK STREETS.
BRAUN BLVD
NO ONE TOLD ME I WAS GOING TO HAVE TO DEAL WITH SUPER-FREAKS.
THE BEST PART OF AN HOUR, AND SEVERAL CHANGES OF CAB LATER...
"H" TOLD ME NEVER TO GET DIRECTLY IN TOUCH WITH HIM...
...BUT THIS IS A GRAVE EMERGENCY. WHAT IF SPIDER-MAN IS INVOLVED? OR THE AVENGERS?
HELLO? THIS IS MORRIE--YEH THAT MORRIE. LEMME SPEAK TO THE BOSS...
SUDDENLY...
SORRY TO CRASH IN ON YOU, BUT I HAVE THIS REAL IMPORTANT CALL TO MAKE--
THE TORCH!
WHO?
HEY--I'M FLATTERED YOU REMEMBER ME. NOW MAYBE YOU'D LIKE TO GET A FEW THINGS OFF YOUR CHEST?
WITH EXPLOSIVE SUDDENESS, THE MAN DUCKS UNDER JOHNNY'S ARM AND BOLTS...
HEY!
YOU'VE GOT NOTHING ON ME! NOTHING!
THERE'S NO WAY THE COPS COULD PIN THAT HIT ON ME!
GASPING FOR BREATH HE RUNS, FISHING IN HIS POCKET FOR A CIGARETTE LIGHTER AS HE GOES...
"H" WOULD KILL ME IF HE KNEW I'D KEPT HIS NUMBER. I WAS SUPPOSED TO MEMORIZE IT, THEN DESTROY IT.
BUT I HAVE SUCH A BAD MEMORY!!
THERE'S STILL TIME, THO', EVEN THE TORCH WON'T BE ABLE TO REACH ME BEFORE I CAN TOUCH IT OFF.
LOOKS LIKE YOU FLUNK YOUR "FANTASTIC FOUR TRIVIA QUIZ," PAL...
YOU SEEM TO HAVE FORGOTTEN I HAVE A LIMITED AMOUNT OF CONTROL OVER FLAME OTHER THAN MY OWN...
NO!
THAT FIRE ISN'T GOING ANYWHERE NEAR THAT PAPER IF I DON'T WANT IT TO...

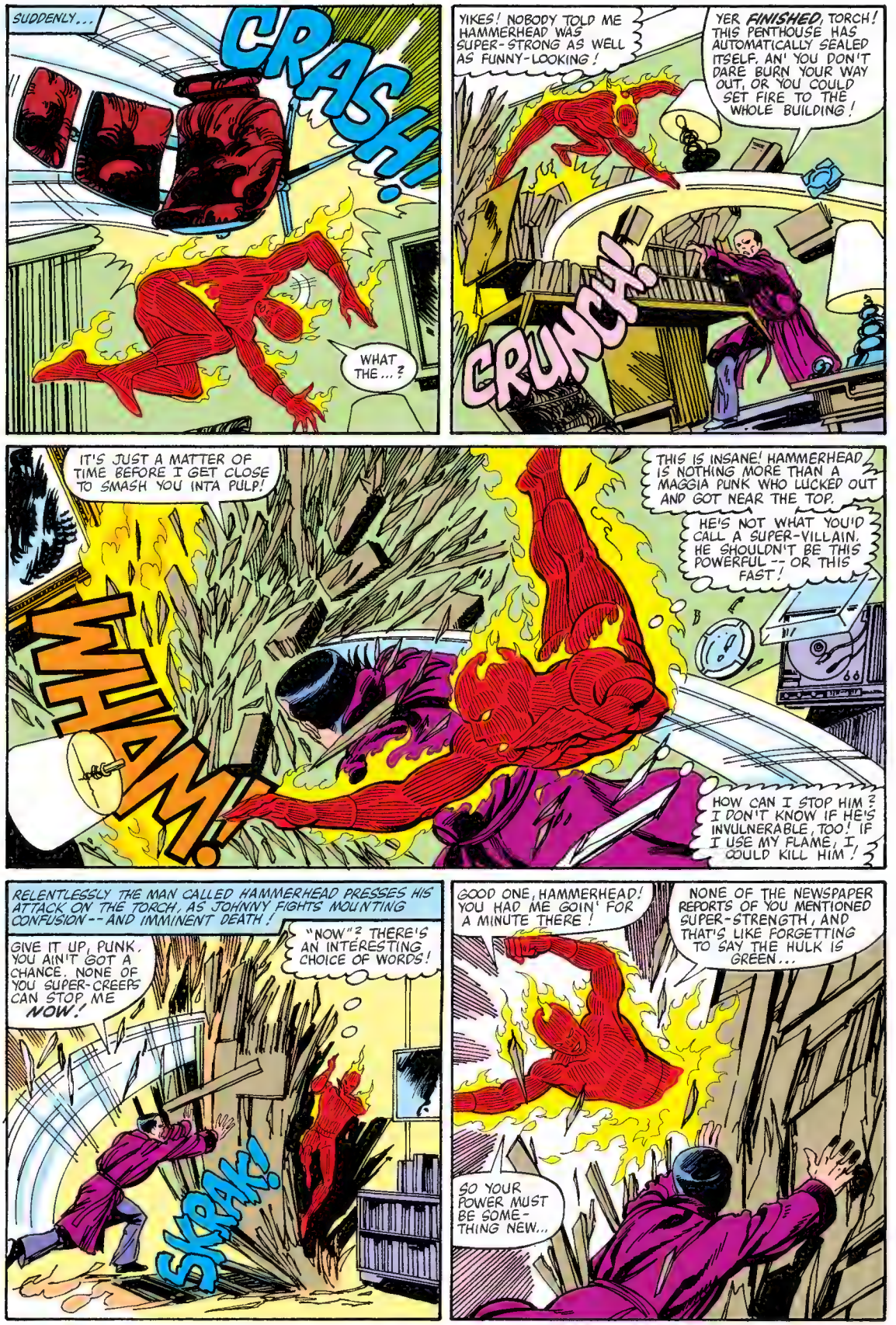

AND JUST TO MAKE SURE YOU DON'T STRAY TOO FAR EITHER...
A... A FLAMING CAGE!
NOW, I'LL JUST TAKE A LITTLE PEEK AT THAT SCRAP OF PAPER-- IF YOU DON'T MIND...
NO! YOU CAN'T! I'LL...
MISTER--YOU JUST DON'T KNOW WHEN YOU'RE BEATEN, DO YOU?
HM! A NEW YORK AREA CODE. THAT'S A START, ANYWAY. OKAY, FRIEND, THERE'S NOTHING THE COPS CAN PIN ON YOU OTHER THAN UNUSUAL TELEPHONE HABITS...
SO I'LL HAVE TO LET YOU GO-- BUT JUST WATCH YOURSELF...
AND SO, A FEW SHORT HOURS LATER...
THE FANTASTIC FOUR HAS NO OFFICIAL JURISDICTION IN ANY LEGAL CASES. WE'VE NEVER BEEN CRIME-FIGHTERS LIKE DAREDEVIL OR SPIDER-MAN, EITHER, BUT...
...THE COMPUTERS IN REED'S LAB HAVE ACCESS TO ALL KINDS OF WEIRD INFO. I SHOULD BE ABLE TO FIND OUT THE LOCATION OF THAT NUMBER.
WITH PRACTICED EASE, THE TORCH DOCKS HIS MODULE OF THE FANTASTICAR.
AND, AN HOUR LATER...
... AT A MOLDERING WAREHOUSE SOMEWHERE NEAR THE HEART OF MANHATTAN'S FABLED GARMENT DISTRICT...
A SOMEWHAT LESS THAN FRIENDLY POKER GAME HAS BEEN UNDERWAY MOST OF THE NIGHT...
HAW HAW! READ 'EM AN' WEEP, SUCKERS! FULL HOUSE!
LEMME SEE THAT DECK...
SUDDENLY...
SORRY TO BURST IN ON YOU LIKE THIS GUYS, BUT YOUR FRONT DOOR WAS LOCKED!
HOLY SPIT!
THE HUMAN TORCH!

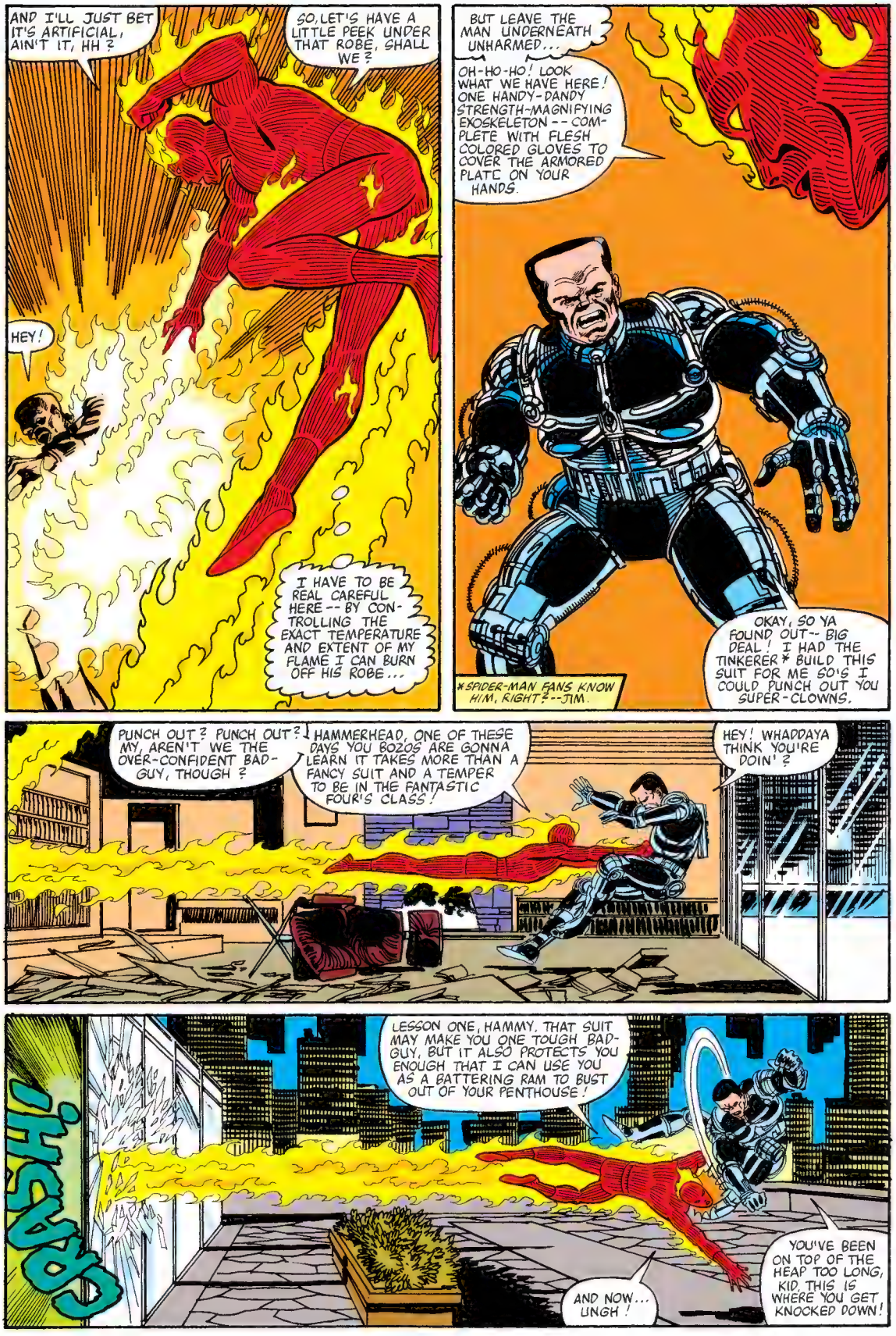

WHAT THE HECK IS HE DOIN' HERE?
NEVER MIND THE QUESTIONS, YA JERK! JUST BLAST 'IM!
BLAM
BLAM
MAN, OH, MAN! I DON'T KNOW WHO YOU GUYS ARE WORKING FOR, BUT HE MUST MAKE LACK OF KNOWLEDGE OF SUPER-FOLKS A JOB PREREQUISITE!
ALL I HAVE TO DO IS RAISE THE TEMPERATURE OF MY FLAME AND YOUR SLUGS MELT BEFORE THEY HIT!
NOT ONLY THAT, BUT WITH THE ADDED SPEED AND AGILITY OF MY FLYING ABILITY I CAN CREAM YOU PUNKS WITHOUT EVEN GETTING TIRED.
SO DO YOURSELVES A FAVOR AND SURRENDER, OKAY, GUYS? IT'LL SAVE TIME AND BRUISES!
STOP HIM! STOP HIM! THERE'S THREE OF US AND ONLY ONE OF HIM!
CLUMP!
OH, COME ON! IF I MADE A FULL LIST OF SOME OF THE SUPER-BADDIES I'VE GONE UP AGAINST...
YOU GUYS WOULDN'T EVEN MAKE IT AS A FOOTNOTE!
WHUMP
BASH!
TWO DOWN -- BUT THE FIRST GUY I CLOBBERED IS UP AND RUNNING.
HEY, HERMAN, WHAT'S YOUR HURRY? YOU AREN'T GOING ANYWHERE!
YOU CAN'T STOP ME! ONCE I REACH THE BACK ALLEY YOU'LL NEVER FIND ME!
CORRECTION, CHUM. IF YOU REACH THE BACK ALLEY...
THE DOOR. HE'S MELTED IT INTO RED-HOT SLAG! I CAN'T GET OUT!

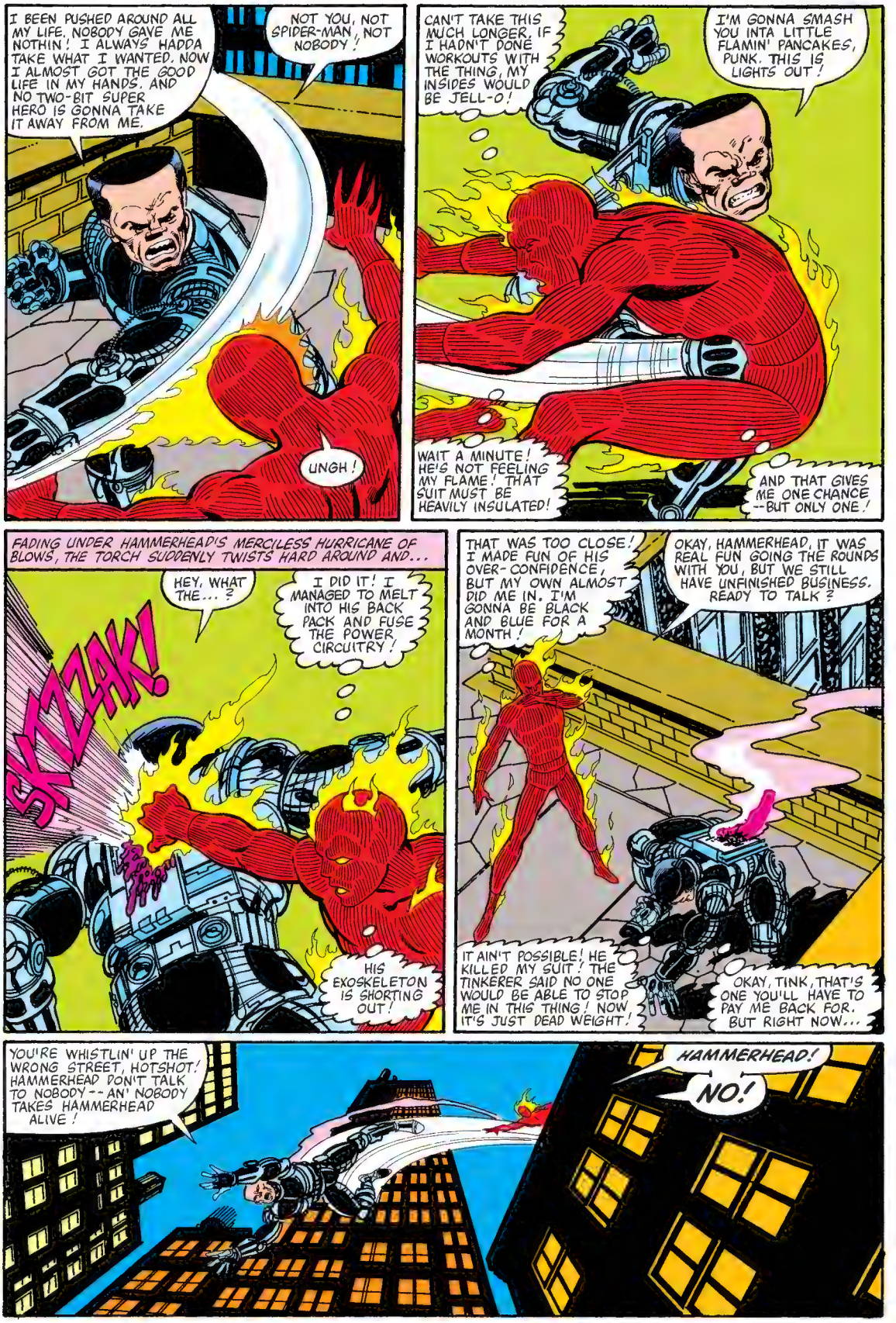

HEY, DON'T RUN AWAY -- I AIN'T FINISHED YET...
SINCE YOU'RE THE ONLY ONE WHO'S STILL CONSCIOUS, YOU'LL HAVE TO TELL ME WHAT I NEED TO KNOW!
NO WAY! THE BOSS'D KILL ME!
KILL YOU? SONNY BOY, BEING DEAD WOULD BE A PICNIC COMPARED TO SOME OF THE THINGS I CAN DO TO YOU.
NOW, 'FESS UP BEFORE I ROAST YOU SO BAD THEY'LL HAVE TO PUT YOU BACK TOGETHER WITH HAMBURGER HELPER!
Y-YOU'RE BLUFFIN', TORCH. YOU'RE A SUPER HERO. SUPER HEROES CAN'T HURT PEOPLE. IT AIN'T ALLOWED...
ARE YOU SERIOUS? WHAT, YOU THINK WE HAVE TO SIGN A CONTRACT OR SOMETHING? "PARTY OF THE FIRST PART AGREES ONLY TO USE HIS POWERS IN FURTHERANCE OF TRUTH, JUSTICE AND ET CETERA?"
TELL ME SOMETHING, WISE-GUY -- IF I COOK YOU, WHO'S GONNA CATCH ME? BETTER STILL -- WHO'S GONNA EVEN KNOW?
I ST-STILL SAY YOU'RE :GULP: BLUFFIN'!
OKAY, LET'S FIND OUT ABOUT THAT, SHALL WE? BEARDS AND LONG HAIR ARE KINDA PASSÉ, Y'KNOW? HOW'S ABOUT I GIVE YOU A NICE CLOSE SHAVE?
DON'T MOVE AROUND TOO MUCH NOW. IF I SLIP...
I CAN CONTROL MY FLAME TO WITHIN A HAIR'S BREADTH, SO THERE'S NO CHANCE OF BURNING HIM -- BUT THERE'S NO NEED FOR HIM TO KNOW THAT.
AWRIGHT! AWRIGHT! I'LL TALK!
AND TALK HE DOES, SPILLING EVERYTHING HE KNOWS TO THE BEMUSED HUMAN TORCH...
THAT'S JUST ABOUT ENOUGH, PAL. NOW YOU BE A GOOD BOY AND WAIT FOR THE POLICE.
DON'T FORCE ME TO COME LOOKIN' FOR YOU!
N-NO SIR!
GOOD THING HE BROKE. I WAS BLUFFING AND I HATE TO THINK HOW FAR I MIGHT HAVE BEEN FORCED TO GO TO PROVE I WASN'T!
SO, AFTER WAITING TO MAKE CERTAIN NEW YORK'S FINEST HAVE PICKED UP HIS CAPTIVES, THE TORCH HEADS OVER CENTRAL PARK, AND...
WHEW! LOOK AT THOSE DIGS!
WHOEVER IT WAS WHO SAID "CRIME DOES NOT PAY" DIDN'T FIGURE ON THE MAGGIA AND BIG-BUSINESS, WHITE-COLLAR GANG BOSSES!


A SILENT COMMAND DOUSES JOHNNY'S FLAME, AND...
ALL I WAS ABLE TO GET OUT OF THAT FLUNKY WAS THIS ADDRESS--AND THE FACT THAT HIS BOSS IS KNOWN AS "H."
WHOMEVER THIS MAGGIA BIGWIG IS, HE'S KEEPING ONE HECKUVA LOW PROFILE.
CAUTIOUSLY, THE TORCH EAGES TOWARD AN OPEN WINDOW...
VOICES! SOUNDS LIKE A COUNCIL OF WAR!
THE TIME HAS COME TO GATHER OUR FAMILIES UNDER ONE HEAD. AND THAT HEAD IS GONNA BE ME!
YOU'LL FORGIVE ME IF I DISAGREE, H.
YOU'RE TOO WELL KNOWN. YOUR FACE HAS BEEN PLASTERED OVER THE FRONT-PAGE OF EVERY RAG IN THIS BURG.
CROCETTI'S RIGHT, HAMMER. YOUR VENDETTA AGAINST SPIDER-MAN HAS MADE YOU A CELEB!
YOU'RE ALL WRONG--AN' I'LL PROVE IT...
SORRY I'M LATE, FELLAS. I DIDN'T FIND OUT ABOUT YOUR PARTY UNTIL HALF AN HOUR AGO. HOPE THERE'S SOME CANAPES LEFT.
THE HUMAN TORCH! HOW'D HE GET WISE TO US?
DON'T PANIC, YA LOUSY JERKS! I'VE MESSED WITH SUPER-CLOWNS BEFORE. I CAN HANDLE HIM EASY.
HEY! I KNOW YOU! YOU'RE THE ONE THEY CALL "HAMMERHEAD." YOU WERE SURGICALLY RE-BUILT BY SOME NUTSO SCIENTIST...
BUT YOU'RE SUPPOSED TO BE DEAD. YOU DIED IN A HELICOPTER CRASH IN THE HUDSON RIVER! *
HAMMERHEAD DON'T DIE THAT EASY, PUNK--AS YOU'RE GONNA FIND OUT IF YOU MESS WITH ME.
NOW, WHADDAYA WANT HERE?
*THAT STIRRING SAGA WAS RELATED IN AMAZING SPIDER-MAN #157 THROUGH #159--SALICRUP.


I'M FOLLOWING THE TRAIL OF A TWO-YEAR-OLD MURDER, HAMMERHEAD. A MURDER THAT A MAN NAMED MUNSON WAS FRAMED FOR. AND DIED FOR. AND THAT TRAIL LEADS RIGHT TO YOU!
MUNSON? MUNSON? I DON'T KNOW NO MUNSON. I DON'T KNOW WHAT YOU'RE TRYING TO PULL CREEP...
BZZT!
...BUT THIS WHOLE PENTHOUSE IS GUARDED AGAINST THE LIKES OF YOU!
THE TOUCH OF A HIDDEN BUTTON, AND...
HOLY COW!
SOME KIND OF RED-HOT PINCER-THINGS SPRINGING UP FROM THE FLOOR!
THWANG
THWONK
HAMMERHEAD MUST REALLY BE SCARED. I GUESS HE'S AFRAID SPIDER-MAN WILL COME AFTER HIM...
AND A TRAP LIKE THIS COULD FRY MY WALL-CRAWLING BUDDY BUT GOOD!
'COURSE, IT DOESN'T FAZE ME IN THE LEAST!
FLAME ON!
AND NOW, MISTER H, IF YOU'RE FINISHED PLAYING WITH YOUR TOYS, WE STILL HAVE SOME BUSINESS TO DISCUSS.
YOUR TRAP DIDN'T WORK! HE'S FREE!
GEDDADA HERE YA YELLOW CRUDS!
HAMMERHEAD DON'T NEED THE HELP OF JERKS LIKE YOU!
AH-AH-AHH! SORRY, KIDDIES, BUT I THINK THE POLICE MIGHT WANT A FEW WORDS WITH SOME OF YOU!
HISSS
THE LOCK!
HE MELTED IT!


SUDDENLY...
CRASH!
WHAT THE...?
YIKES! NOBODY TOLD ME HAMMERHEAD WAS SUPER-STRONG AS WELL AS FUNNY-LOOKING!
YER FINISHED, TORCH! THIS PENTHOUSE HAS AUTOMATICALLY SEALED ITSELF, AN' YOU DON'T DARE BURN YOUR WAY OUT, OR YOU COULD SET FIRE TO THE WHOLE BUILDING!
CRUNCH!
IT'S JUST A MATTER OF TIME BEFORE I GET CLOSE TO SMASH YOU INTA PULP!
WHAM!
THIS IS INSANE! HAMMERHEAD IS NOTHING MORE THAN A MAGGIA PUNK WHO LUCKED OUT AND GOT NEAR THE TOP.
HE'S NOT WHAT YOU'D CALL A SUPER-VILLAIN. HE SHOULDN'T BE THIS POWERFUL -- OR THIS FAST!
HOW CAN I STOP HIM? I DON'T KNOW IF HE'S INVULNERABLE, TOO! IF I USE MY FLAME, I COULD KILL HIM!
RELENTLESSLY THE MAN CALLED HAMMERHEAD PRESSES HIS ATTACK ON THE TORCH, AS JOHNNY FIGHTS MOUNTING CONFUSION -- AND IMMINENT DEATH!
GIVE IT UP, PUNK, YOU AIN'T GOT A CHANCE. NONE OF YOU SUPER-CREEPS CAN STOP ME NOW!
"NOW"? THERE'S AN INTERESTING CHOICE OF WORDS!
SKRAK!
GOOD ONE, HAMMERHEAD! YOU HAD ME GOIN' FOR A MINUTE THERE!
NONE OF THE NEWSPAPER REPORTS OF YOU MENTIONED SUPER-STRENGTH, AND THAT'S LIKE FORGETTING TO SAY THE HULK IS GREEN...
SO YOUR POWER MUST BE SOME-THING NEW...


AND I'LL JUST BET IT'S ARTIFICIAL, AIN'T IT, HH?
SO, LET'S HAVE A LITTLE PEEK UNDER THAT ROBE, SHALL WE?
HEY!
I HAVE TO BE REAL CAREFUL HERE -- BY CONTROLLING THE EXACT TEMPERATURE AND EXTENT OF MY FLAME I CAN BURN OFF HIS ROBE...
BUT LEAVE THE MAN UNDERNEATH UNHARMED...
OH-HO-HO! LOOK WHAT WE HAVE HERE! ONE HANDY-DANDY STRENGTH-MAGNIFYING EXOSKELETON -- COMPLETE WITH FLESH COLORED GLOVES TO COVER THE ARMORED PLATE ON YOUR HANDS.
OKAY, SO YA FOUND OUT -- BIG DEAL! I HAD THE TINKERER* BUILD THIS SUIT FOR ME SO'S I COULD PUNCH OUT YOU SUPER-CLOWNS.
*SPIDER-MAN FANS KNOW HIM, RIGHT? --JIM.
PUNCH OUT? PUNCH OUT? MY, AREN'T WE THE OVER-CONFIDENT BAD-GUY, THOUGH?
HAMMERHEAD, ONE OF THESE DAYS YOU BOZOS ARE GONNA LEARN IT TAKES MORE THAN A FANCY SUIT AND A TEMPER TO BE IN THE FANTASTIC FOUR'S CLASS!
HEY! WHADDAYA THINK YOU'RE DOIN'?
CRASH!
LESSON ONE, HAMMY. THAT SUIT MAY MAKE YOU ONE TOUGH BAD-GUY, BUT IT ALSO PROTECTS YOU ENOUGH THAT I CAN USE YOU AS A BATTERING RAM TO BUST OUT OF YOUR PENTHOUSE!
AND NOW... UNGH!
YOU'VE BEEN ON TOP OF THE HEAP TOO LONG, KID. THIS IS WHERE YOU GET KNOCKED DOWN!


I BEEN PUSHED AROUND ALL MY LIFE, NOBODY GAVE ME NOTHIN! I ALWAYS HADDA TAKE WHAT I WANTED. NOW I ALMOST GOT THE GOOD LIFE IN MY HANDS, AND NO TWO-BIT SUPER HERO IS GONNA TAKE IT AWAY FROM ME.
NOT YOU, NOT SPIDER-MAN, NOT NOBODY!
UNGH!
CAN'T TAKE THIS MUCH LONGER. IF I HADN'T DONE WORKOUTS WITH THE THING, MY INSIDES WOULD BE JELL-O!
I'M GONNA SMASH YOU INTA LITTLE FLAMIN' PANCAKES, PUNK. THIS IS LIGHTS OUT!
WAIT A MINUTE! HE'S NOT FEELING MY FLAME! THAT SUIT MUST BE HEAVILY INSULATED!
AND THAT GIVES ME ONE CHANCE --BUT ONLY ONE!
FADING UNDER HAMMERHEAD'S MERCILESS HURRICANE OF BLOWS, THE TORCH SUDDENLY TWISTS HARD AROUND AND...
SKIZZAK!
HEY, WHAT THE...?
I DID IT! I MANAGED TO MELT INTO HIS BACK PACK AND FUSE THE POWER CIRCUITRY!
HIS EXOSKELETON IS SHORTING OUT!
THAT WAS TOO CLOSE! I MADE FUN OF HIS OVER-CONFIDENCE, BUT MY OWN ALMOST DID ME IN. I'M GONNA BE BLACK AND BLUE FOR A MONTH!
OKAY, HAMMERHEAD, IT WAS REAL FUN GOING THE ROUNDS WITH YOU, BUT WE STILL HAVE UNFINISHED BUSINESS. READY TO TALK?
IT AIN'T POSSIBLE! HE KILLED MY SUIT! THE TINKERER SAID NO ONE WOULD BE ABLE TO STOP ME IN THIS THING! NOW IT'S JUST DEAD WEIGHT!
OKAY, TINK, THAT'S ONE YOU'LL HAVE TO PAY ME BACK FOR. BUT RIGHT NOW...
YOU'RE WHISTLIN' UP THE WRONG STREET, HOTSHOT! HAMMERHEAD DON'T TALK TO NOBODY -- AN' NOBODY TAKES HAMMERHEAD ALIVE!
HAMMERHEAD!
NO!

BLAST IT, MY GUTS ARE STILL CHURNING SO MUCH FROM HAMMERHEAD'S POUNDING I CAN BARELY THINK STRAIGHT...
BUT I CAN'T JUST STAND HERE LIKE A LUMP WHILE HE KILLS HIMSELF.
LIKE A FALLEN STAR, THE HUMAN TORCH PLUNGES TOWARDS THE STREET BELOW, ONLY TO FIND...
NOTHING! NO SIGN OF HIM! AND THE PEOPLE ON THE STREET AREN'T REACTING AS IF HE LANDED.
SUCKERED AGAIN! IT MUST ALL HAVE BEEN PART OF A PRE-ARRANGED ESCAPE PLAN.
I SHOULD HAVE EXPECTED IT, KNOWING HIS RAMPANT PARANOIA ABOUT SPIDER-MAN. NATURALLY HAMMERHEAD WOULD HAVE A FEW QUICK EXITS RIGGED.
OH, WELL. MIGHT AS WELL MAKE THE BEST OF IT AND CALL THE COPS TO COME AND TAKE CARE OF MR. H'S PLAYMATES.
AND SO, WITHIN THE HOUR...
NOT BAD FOR A FIRST-TIMER, TORCH. YOU'VE BAGGED US SOME OF THE BIGGEST WIGS THE MAGGIA HAS. I CAN BOOK THESE GUYS JUST FOR BREATHING THE SAME AIR.
WOULDN'T BE AT ALL SURPRISED IF YOU GET SOME KIND OF COMMENDATION FOR THIS.
THANKS, LIEUTENANT. THAT'LL BE A NICE LITTLE REMINDER OF HOW I FUDGED UP.
FUDGED UP? I DON'T UNDERSTAND.
I DIDN'T COME HERE TO CATCH MAGGIA DONS, LIEUTENANT. I CAME TO GET HAMMERHEAD TO CONFESS TO HIS INVOLVEMENT IN A MURDER A GUY I USED TO KNOW WAS FRIED FOR. AND HAMMY HAD NEVER HEARD OF HIM.
TOO BAD. WISH WE COULD HELP, BUT WE'RE SURPRISED ENOUGH JUST TO HEAR HAMMERHEAD WAS ALIVE AFTER THAT CRASH.
SAY, WAIT A MINUTE, THOUGH. THAT OTHER SUPER-GUY -- DAREDEVIL -- JUST TURNED IN ALL THE KINGPIN'S SECRET RECORDS.* SEEMS KINGPIN WAS KEEPING COMPLETE DOSSIERS ON EVERYONE IN THE MOBS. MAYBE THAT WILL HAVE SOMETHING OF INTEREST TO YOU?
HMM. MAYBE IT WILL, LIEUTENANT. MAYBE IT WILL!
*SEE DAREDEVIL #172. --SALICRUP.

EP. 109

ONE MONTH LATER...

AN UNSEASONAL AUTUMN-LIKE CHILL TOUCHES THE UNHALLOWED GROUND OF THE CEMETERY BEHIND DEEDEN STATE CORRECTIONAL FACILITY.

AMIDST THE CREAK OF OLD DEAD TREES AND THE RUSTLE OF DRY LEAVES, TWO PEOPLE SPEAK IN WHISPERS...

I FOUND WHAT I WAS LOOKING FOR, MRS. MUNSON.

YOUR BOY GEORGIE WAS A FALL GUY, THAT'S ALL. THE OLD GEEZER WHO RAN THE LIQUOR STORE WAS "LAUNDERING" MONEY FOR THE MAGGIA. HAMMERHEAD FOUND OUT HE WAS ALSO SKIMMING A FEW THOUSANDS BUCKS A YEAR FOR HIMSELF. SO HAMMERHEAD SENT ONE OF HIS GOONS, A GUY NAMED MORRIS VANCE, TO OFF THE OLD GUY.

"VANCE SAW AN OPPORTUNITY TO SET HIMSELF UP AS THE NEW OWNER, SO HE PICKED OUT YOUR SON--APPARENTLY AT RANDOM--STRUCK UP A "FRIENDSHIP" WITH HIM, AND DETAILED HIS PLAN TO "ROB" THE LIQUOR STORE.

"HE EVEN SHOWED GEORGIE THE GUN, WHICH OF COURSE, GOT HIS FINGERPRINTS ALL OVER IT.

"THEN VANCE JUST BIDED HIS TIME UNTIL GEORGIE DECIDED TO HIT THE STORE FOR HIMSELF...

"...AND, USING THE GUN AND WEARING GLOVES SO AS NOT TO GET HIS PRINTS ON THE GUN, VANCE KILLED THE OLD OWNER, WHO WAS ALREADY UNCONSCIOUS FROM GEORGIE'S ATTACK."

THAT WAS PROBABLY WHY VANCE WAS SO SPOOKED WHEN I LOOKED IN THAT STOREROOM. HE DIDN'T WANT ME NOTICING HE'D BRICKED UP THE WINDOW HE'D ONCE USED TO GET IN.

VANCE IS BEING HELD HIMSELF NOW, PENDING CHARGES. I KNOW THIS DOESN'T BRING GEORGIE BACK, MRS. MUNSON...

THAT'S OKAY, MR. TORCH. HE WAS A BAD BOY, MY GEORGIE. FROM ALL THEM *OTHER* THINGS HE DONE, HE GOT WHAT HE DESERVED.

WHAT? YOU MEAN--YOU MEAN YOU *KNEW*? ALL ALONG YOU KNEW HE HE WAS A CROOK AND A MURDERER?

LISTEN, I MAY BE JUST AN IGNORANT OLD IMMIGRANT LADY, BUT STUPID I AIN'T. I ALWAYS KNEW HE'D COME TO NO GOOD. A MOTHER ALWAYS KNOWS.

MRS. MUNSON, I-I'M SORRY! I WANTED YOU TO BELIEVE THAT GEORGIE WASN'T A MUR--I MEAN I WENT DIGGING THROUGH OLD RECORDS SO YOU COULD THINK THAT HE WAS--

THAT'S BECAUSE YOU'RE THE KIND OF BOY FROM WHO ANY MOTHER COULD GET PROUD.

BECAUSE YOU ARE A HERO.

AND FOR JOHNNY STORM, THE ICY WINDS THAT WHIP AROUND THE WALLS OF DEEDEN, FOR A MOMENT ARE LESS CHILLING...

NEXT ISSUE: WHO IS HE? WHAT IS HE? THE FABULOUS F.F. MEET... THE MAN WITH THE POWER MISS IT NOT!

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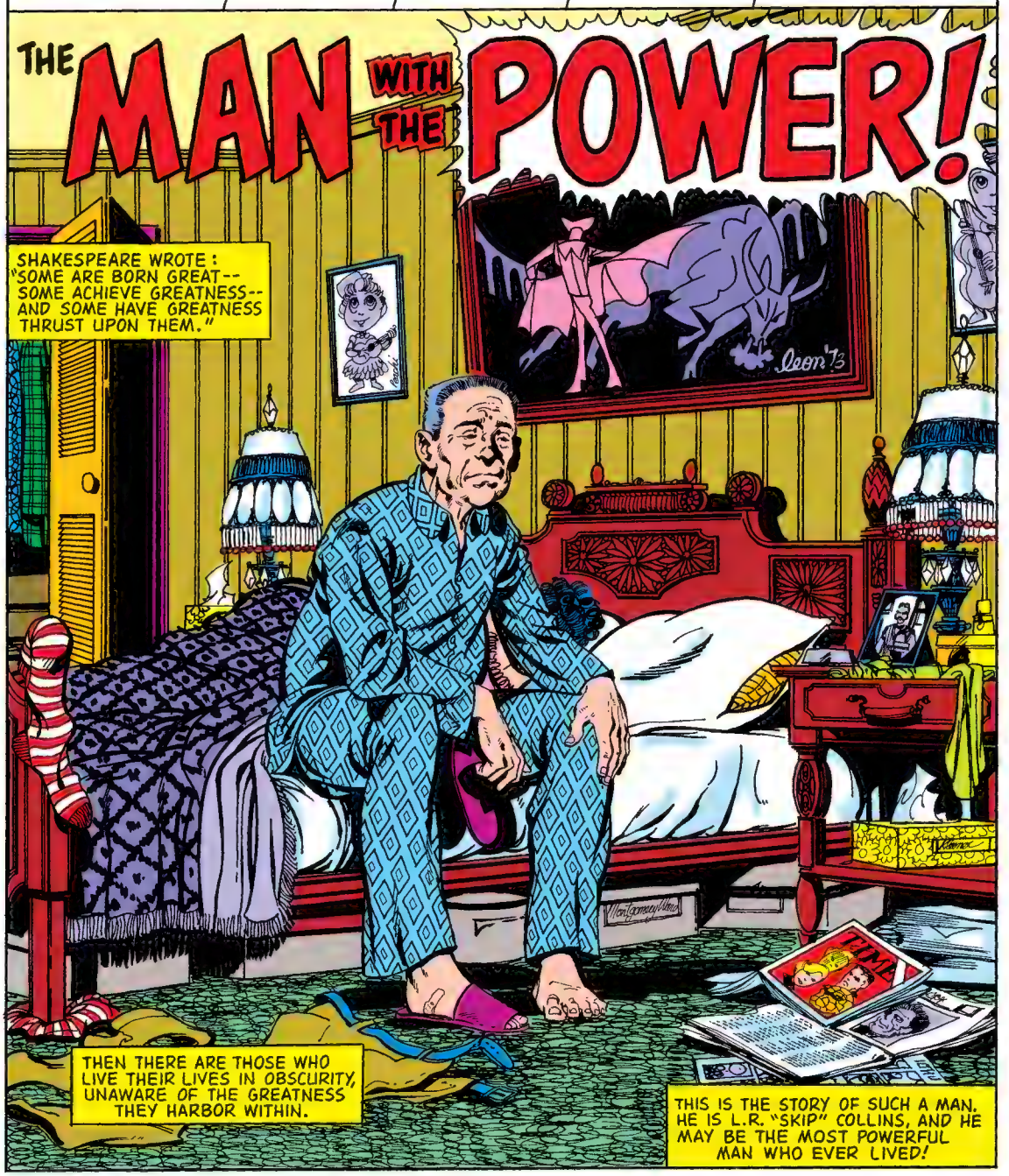
Fantastic Four
WHO IS HE? WHAT IS HE?
THE FABULOUS FF FACE THE MAN WITH THE POWER!

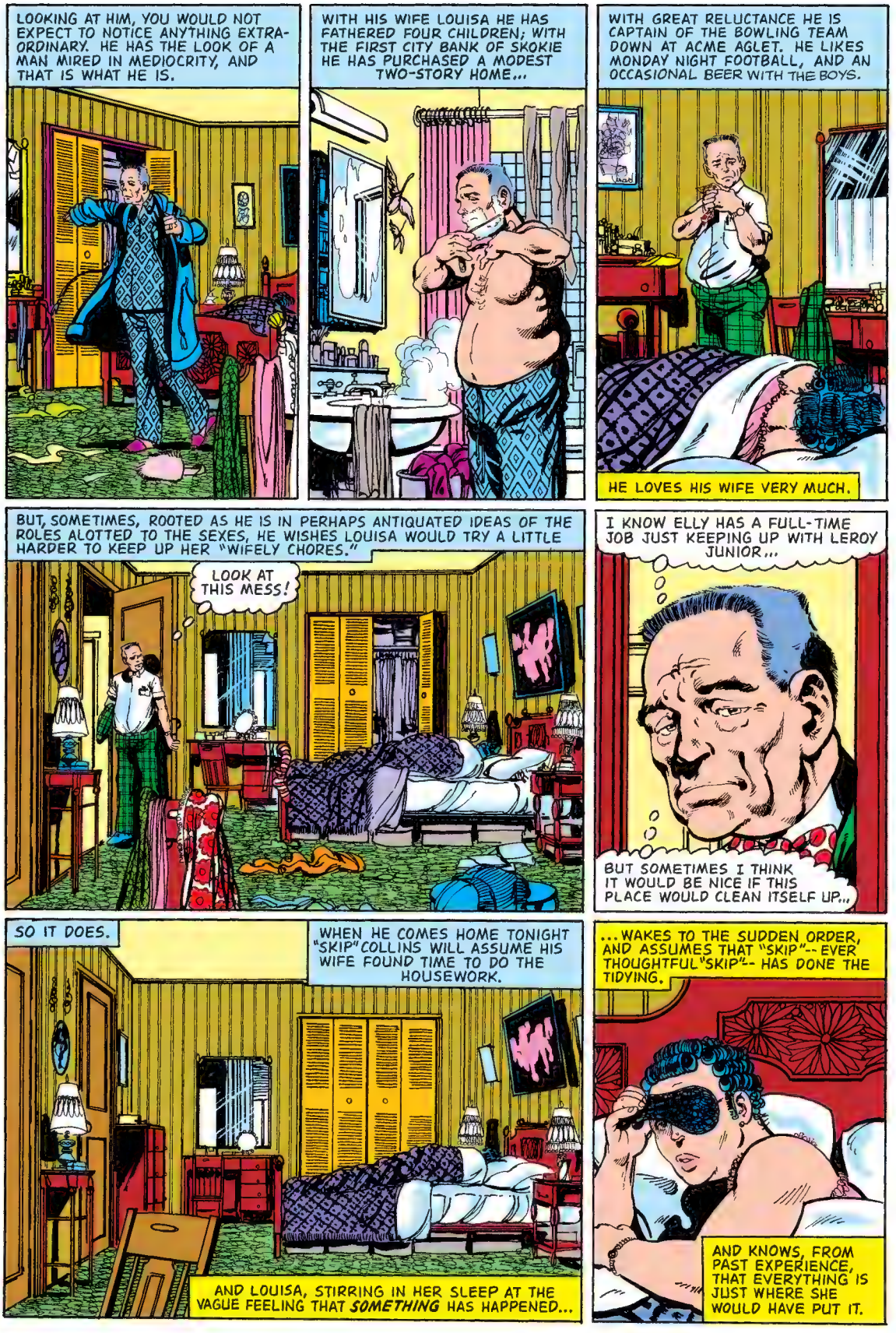
Reed Richards! Ben Grimm! Sue Richards! Johnny Storm! Together they braved the unknown terrors of outer space and were changed into something more than human! MR. FANTASTIC! THE THING! THE INVISIBLE GIRL! THE HUMAN TORCH! And now the world will never again be the same!

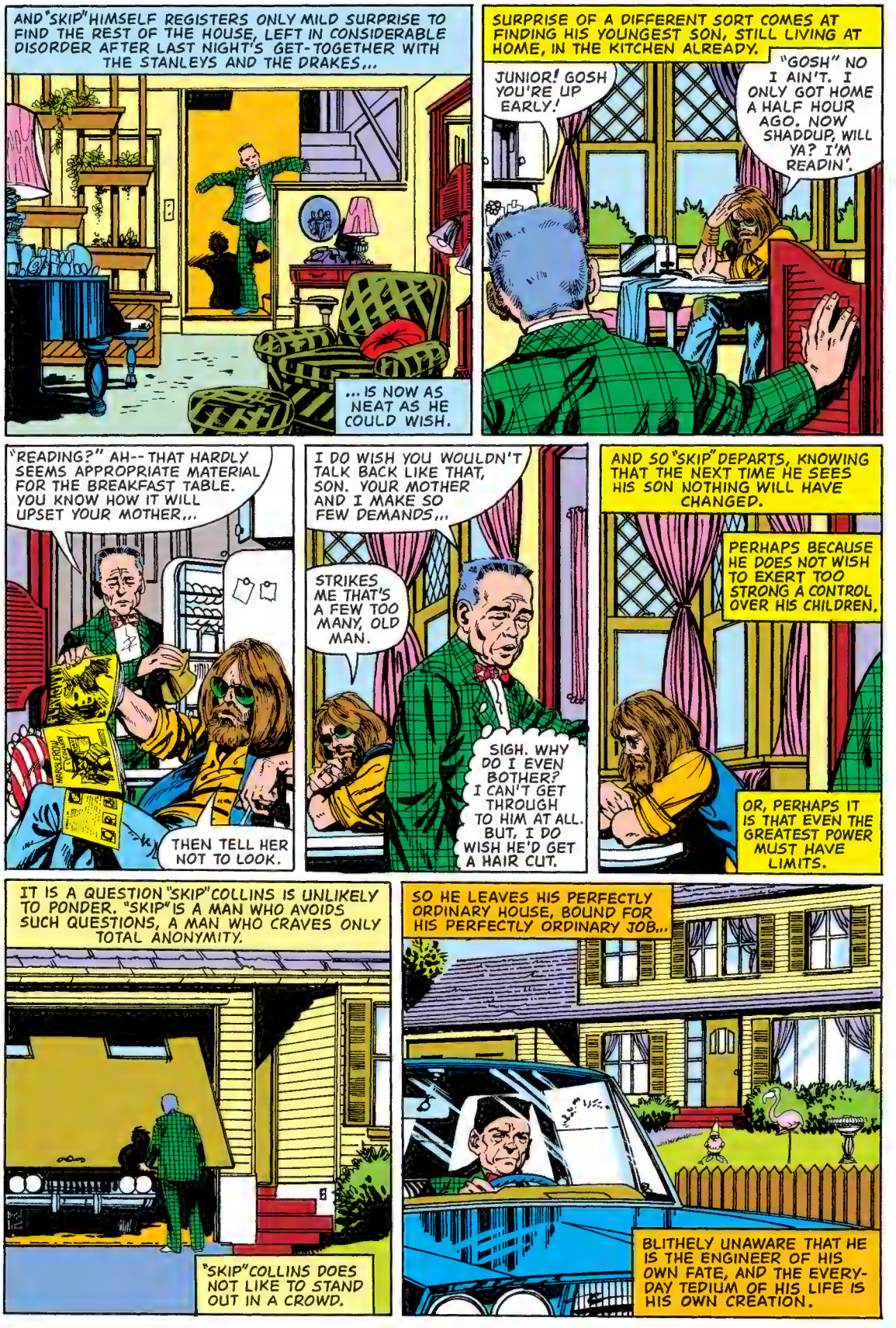
Stan Lee PRESENTS: THE FANTASTIC FOUR!®

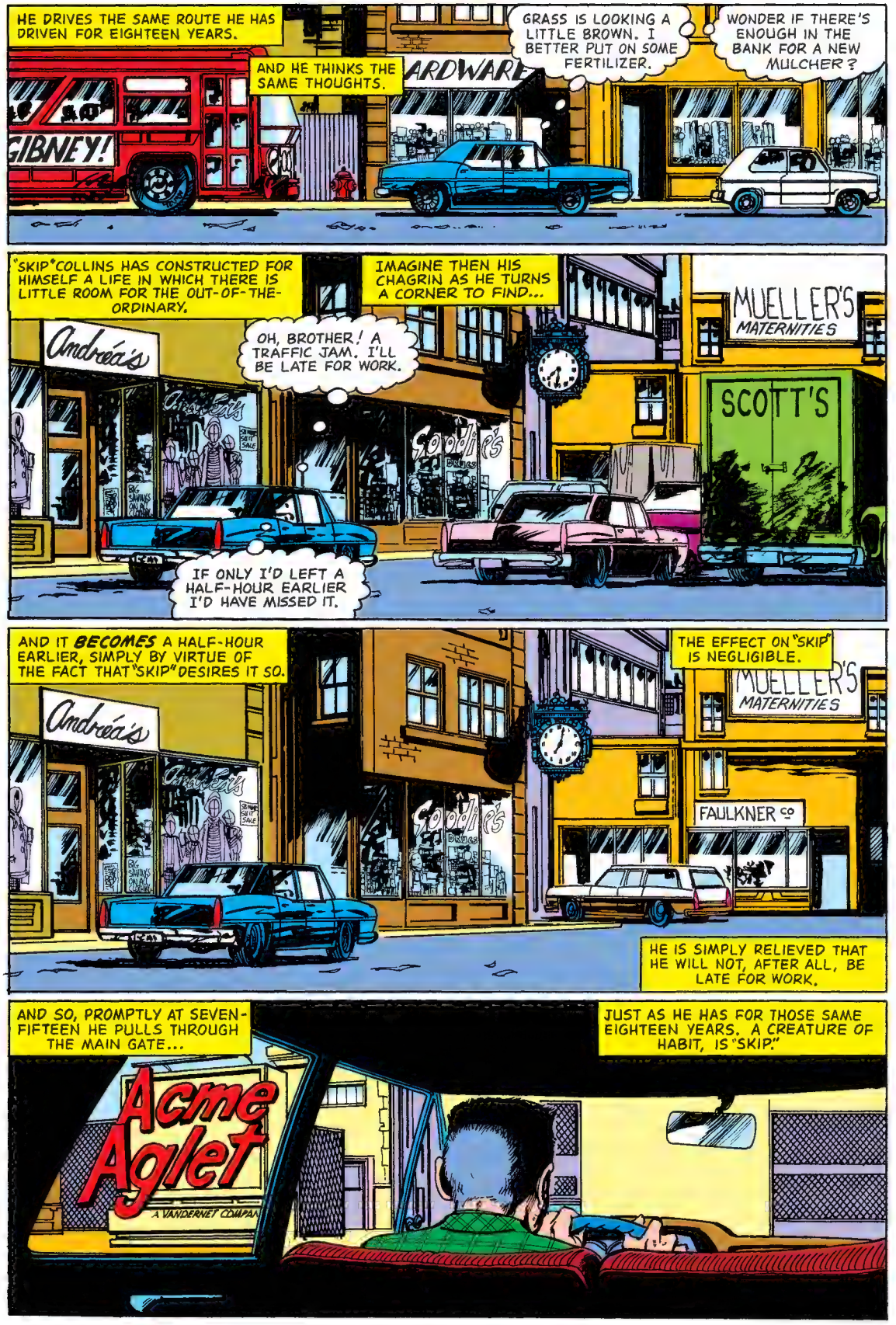
JOHN BYRNE	JEAN SIMEK	BOB SHAREN	JIM SALICRUP	JIM SHOOTER
WORDS AND PICTURES	LETTERING	COLORS	EDITOR	EDITOR-IN-CHIEF

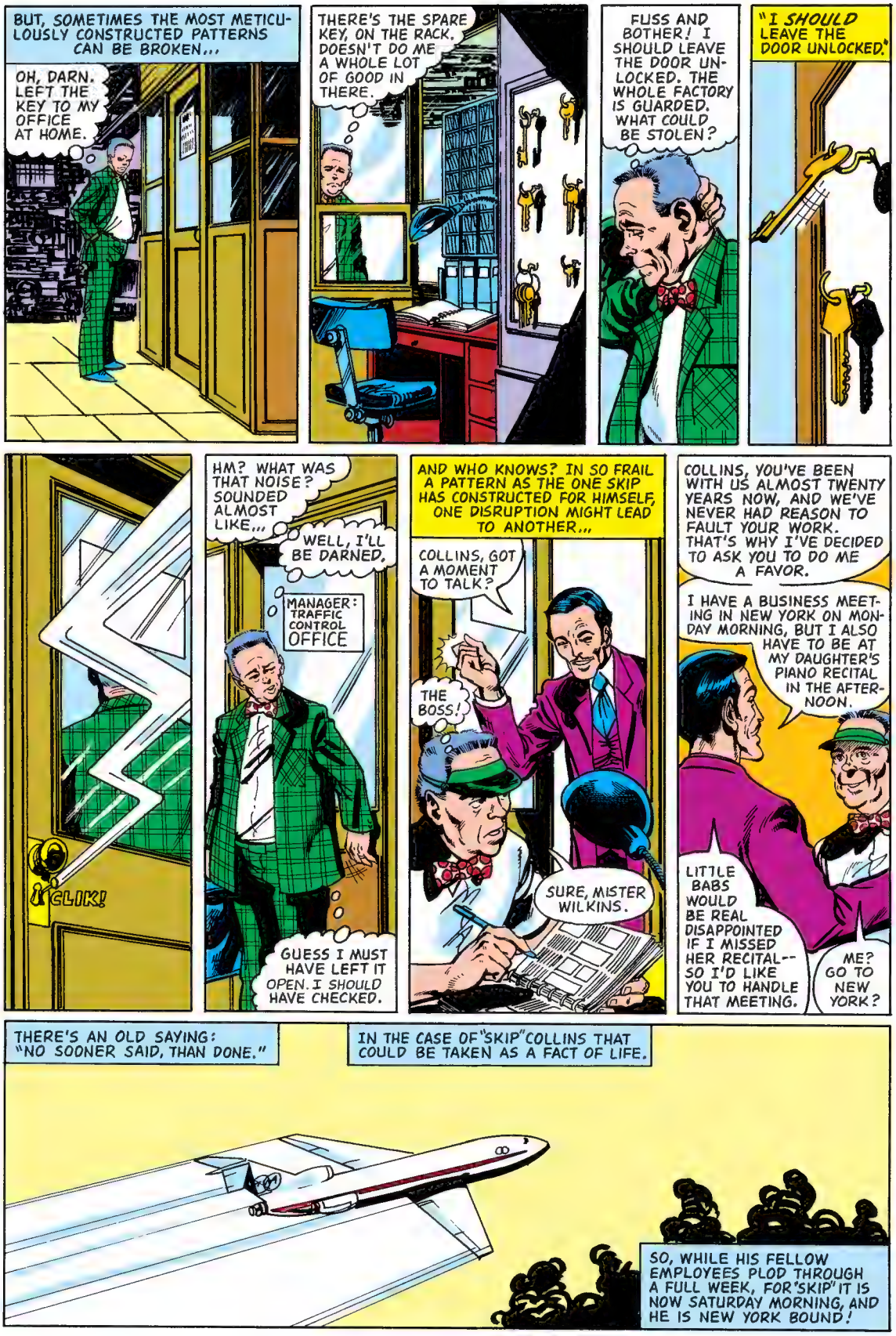
THE MAN WITH THE POWER!

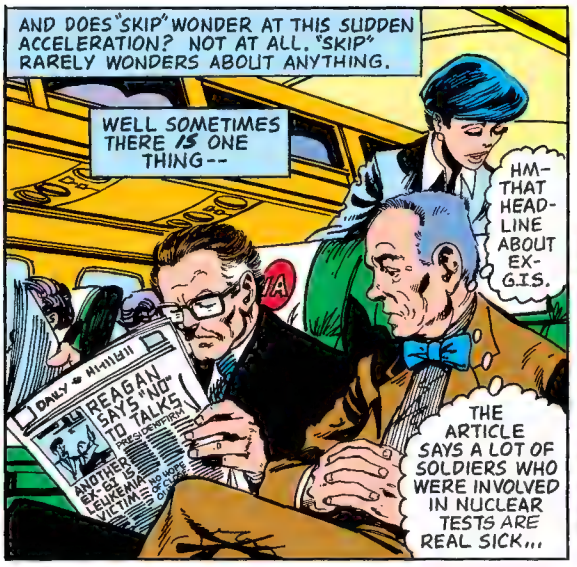

SHAKESPEARE WROTE: "SOME ARE BORN GREAT-- SOME ACHIEVE GREATNESS-- AND SOME HAVE GREATNESS THRUST UPON THEM."
Leon '73
TIME
THEN THERE ARE THOSE WHO LIVE THEIR LIVES IN OBSCURITY, UNAWARE OF THE GREATNESS THEY HARBOR WITHIN.
THIS IS THE STORY OF SUCH A MAN. HE IS L.R. "SKIP" COLLINS, AND HE MAY BE THE MOST POWERFUL MAN WHO EVER LIVED!


LOOKING AT HIM, YOU WOULD NOT EXPECT TO NOTICE ANYTHING EXTRA-ORDINARY. HE HAS THE LOOK OF A MAN MIRED IN MEDIOCRITY, AND THAT IS WHAT HE IS.
WITH HIS WIFE LOUISA HE HAS FATHERED FOUR CHILDREN; WITH THE FIRST CITY BANK OF SKOKIE HE HAS PURCHASED A MODEST TWO-STORY HOME...
WITH GREAT RELUCTANCE HE IS CAPTAIN OF THE BOWLING TEAM DOWN AT ACME AGLET. HE LIKES MONDAY NIGHT FOOTBALL, AND AN OCCASIONAL BEER WITH THE BOYS.
HE LOVES HIS WIFE VERY MUCH.
BUT, SOMETIMES, ROOTED AS HE IS IN PERHAPS ANTIQUATED IDEAS OF THE ROLES ALOTTED TO THE SEXES, HE WISHES LOUISA WOULD TRY A LITTLE HARDER TO KEEP UP HER "WIFELY CHORES."
LOOK AT THIS MESS!
I KNOW ELLY HAS A FULL-TIME JOB JUST KEEPING UP WITH LEROY JUNIOR...
BUT SOMETIMES I THINK IT WOULD BE NICE IF THIS PLACE WOULD CLEAN ITSELF UP...
SO IT DOES.
WHEN HE COMES HOME TONIGHT "SKIP" COLLINS WILL ASSUME HIS WIFE FOUND TIME TO DO THE HOUSEWORK.
AND LOUISA, STIRRING IN HER SLEEP AT THE VAGUE FEELING THAT SOMETHING HAS HAPPENED...
...WAKES TO THE SUDDEN ORDER, AND ASSUMES THAT "SKIP"-- EVER THOUGHTFUL "SKIP"-- HAS DONE THE TIDYING.
AND KNOWS, FROM PAST EXPERIENCE, THAT EVERYTHING IS JUST WHERE SHE WOULD HAVE PUT IT.


AND "SKIP" HIMSELF REGISTERS ONLY MILD SURPRISE TO FIND THE REST OF THE HOUSE, LEFT IN CONSIDERABLE DISORDER AFTER LAST NIGHT'S GET-TOGETHER WITH THE STANLEYS AND THE DRAKES...
... IS NOW AS NEAT AS HE COULD WISH.
SURPRISE OF A DIFFERENT SORT COMES AT FINDING HIS YOUNGEST SON, STILL LIVING AT HOME, IN THE KITCHEN ALREADY.
JUNIOR! GOSH YOU'RE UP EARLY!
"GOSH" NO I AIN'T. I ONLY GOT HOME A HALF HOUR AGO. NOW SHADDUP, WILL YA? I'M READIN'.
"READING?" AH-- THAT HARDLY SEEMS APPROPRIATE MATERIAL FOR THE BREAKFAST TABLE. YOU KNOW HOW IT WILL UPSET YOUR MOTHER...
THEN TELL HER NOT TO LOOK.
I DO WISH YOU WOULDN'T TALK BACK LIKE THAT, SON. YOUR MOTHER AND I MAKE SO FEW DEMANDS...
STRIKES ME THAT'S A FEW TOO MANY, OLD MAN.
SIGH. WHY DO I EVEN BOTHER? I CAN'T GET THROUGH TO HIM AT ALL. BUT, I DO WISH HE'D GET A HAIR CUT.
AND SO "SKIP" DEPARTS, KNOWING THAT THE NEXT TIME HE SEES HIS SON NOTHING WILL HAVE CHANGED.
PERHAPS BECAUSE HE DOES NOT WISH TO EXERT TOO STRONG A CONTROL OVER HIS CHILDREN.
OR, PERHAPS IT IS THAT EVEN THE GREATEST POWER MUST HAVE LIMITS.
IT IS A QUESTION "SKIP" COLLINS IS UNLIKELY TO PONDER. "SKIP" IS A MAN WHO AVOIDS SUCH QUESTIONS, A MAN WHO CRAVES ONLY TOTAL ANONYMITY.
"SKIP" COLLINS DOES NOT LIKE TO STAND OUT IN A CROWD.
SO HE LEAVES HIS PERFECTLY ORDINARY HOUSE, BOUND FOR HIS PERFECTLY ORDINARY JOB...
BLITHELY UNAWARE THAT HE IS THE ENGINEER OF HIS OWN FATE, AND THE EVERY-DAY TEDIUM OF HIS LIFE IS HIS OWN CREATION.

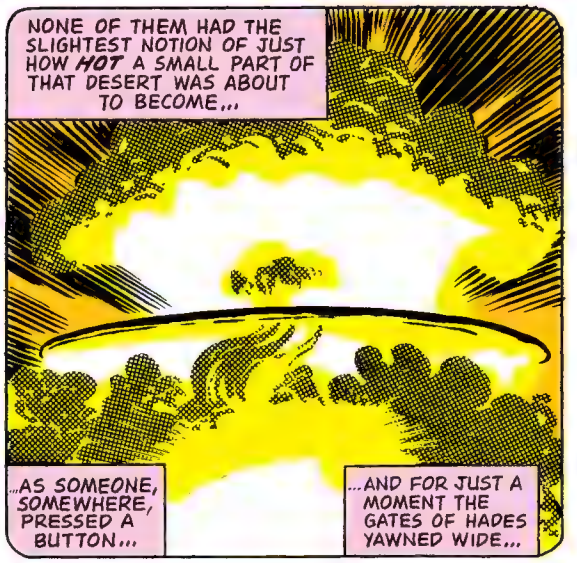

HE DRIVES THE SAME ROUTE HE HAS DRIVEN FOR EIGHTEEN YEARS.
AND HE THINKS THE SAME THOUGHTS.
GRASS IS LOOKING A LITTLE BROWN. I BETTER PUT ON SOME FERTILIZER.
WONDER IF THERE'S ENOUGH IN THE BANK FOR A NEW MULCHER?
GIBNEY!
"SKIP" COLLINS HAS CONSTRUCTED FOR HIMSELF A LIFE IN WHICH THERE IS LITTLE ROOM FOR THE OUT-OF-THE-ORDINARY.
IMAGINE THEN HIS CHAGRIN AS HE TURNS A CORNER TO FIND...
OH, BROTHER! A TRAFFIC JAM. I'LL BE LATE FOR WORK.
IF ONLY I'D LEFT A HALF-HOUR EARLIER I'D HAVE MISSED IT.
Andrea's
MUELLER'S MATERNITIES
SCOTT'S
AND IT BECOMES A HALF-HOUR EARLIER, SIMPLY BY VIRTUE OF THE FACT THAT "SKIP" DESIRES IT SO.
THE EFFECT ON "SKIP" IS NEGLIGIBLE.
FAULKNER CO
HE IS SIMPLY RELIEVED THAT HE WILL NOT, AFTER ALL, BE LATE FOR WORK.
AND SO, PROMPTLY AT SEVEN-FIFTEEN HE PULLS THROUGH THE MAIN GATE...
JUST AS HE HAS FOR THOSE SAME EIGHTEEN YEARS. A CREATURE OF HABIT, IS "SKIP."
Acme Aglet
A VANDERNET COMPAN

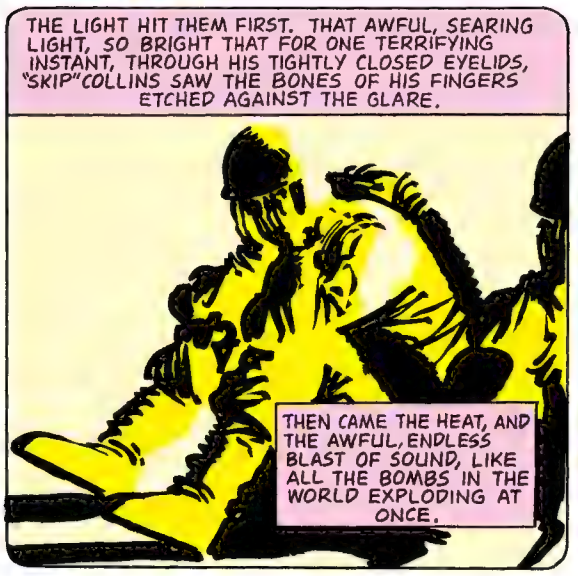

BUT, SOMETIMES THE MOST METICULOUSLY CONSTRUCTED PATTERNS CAN BE BROKEN...
OH, DARN. LEFT THE KEY TO MY OFFICE AT HOME.
THERE'S THE SPARE KEY, ON THE RACK. DOESN'T DO ME A WHOLE LOT OF GOOD IN THERE.
FUSS AND BOTHER! I SHOULD LEAVE THE DOOR UNLOCKED. THE WHOLE FACTORY IS GUARDED. WHAT COULD BE STOLEN?
"I SHOULD LEAVE THE DOOR UNLOCKED."
CLIK!
HM? WHAT WAS THAT NOISE? SOUNDED ALMOST LIKE...
WELL, I'LL BE DARNED.
MANAGER: TRAFFIC CONTROL OFFICE
GUESS I MUST HAVE LEFT IT OPEN. I SHOULD HAVE CHECKED.
AND WHO KNOWS? IN SO FRAIL A PATTERN AS THE ONE SKIP HAS CONSTRUCTED FOR HIMSELF, ONE DISRUPTION MIGHT LEAD TO ANOTHER...
COLLINS, GOT A MOMENT TO TALK?
THE BOSS!
SURE, MISTER WILKINS.
COLLINS, YOU'VE BEEN WITH US ALMOST TWENTY YEARS NOW, AND WE'VE NEVER HAD REASON TO FAULT YOUR WORK. THAT'S WHY I'VE DECIDED TO ASK YOU TO DO ME A FAVOR.
I HAVE A BUSINESS MEETING IN NEW YORK ON MONDAY MORNING, BUT I ALSO HAVE TO BE AT MY DAUGHTER'S PIANO RECITAL IN THE AFTERNOON.
LITTLE BABS WOULD BE REAL DISAPPOINTED IF I MISSED HER RECITAL-- SO I'D LIKE YOU TO HANDLE THAT MEETING.
ME? GO TO NEW YORK?
THERE'S AN OLD SAYING: "NO SOONER SAID, THAN DONE."
IN THE CASE OF "SKIP" COLLINS THAT COULD BE TAKEN AS A FACT OF LIFE.
SO, WHILE HIS FELLOW EMPLOYEES PLOD THROUGH A FULL WEEK, FOR "SKIP" IT IS NOW SATURDAY MORNING, AND HE IS NEW YORK BOUND!

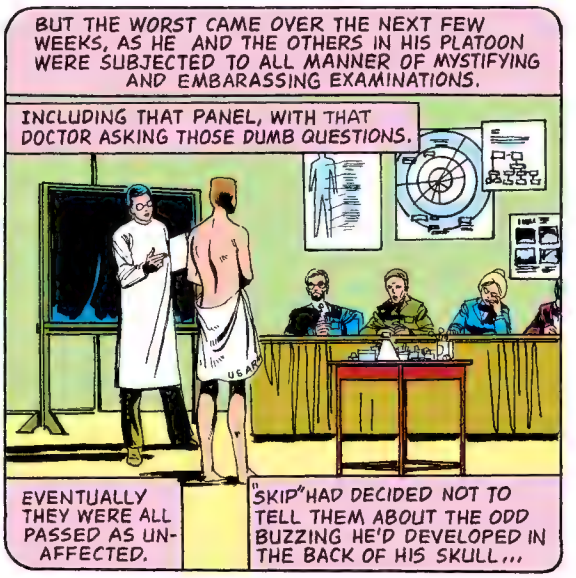

AND DOES "SKIP" WONDER AT THIS SUDDEN ACCELERATION? NOT AT ALL. "SKIP" RARELY WONDERS ABOUT ANYTHING.
WELL SOMETIMES THERE IS ONE THING--
HM- THAT HEAD- LINE ABOUT EX- G.I.S.
DAILY
REAGAN SAYS "NO" TO TALKS
ANOTHER EX-G.I. IS LEUKEMIA VICTIM
THE ARTICLE SAYS A LOT OF SOLDIERS WHO WERE INVOLVED IN NUCLEAR TESTS ARE REAL SICK...

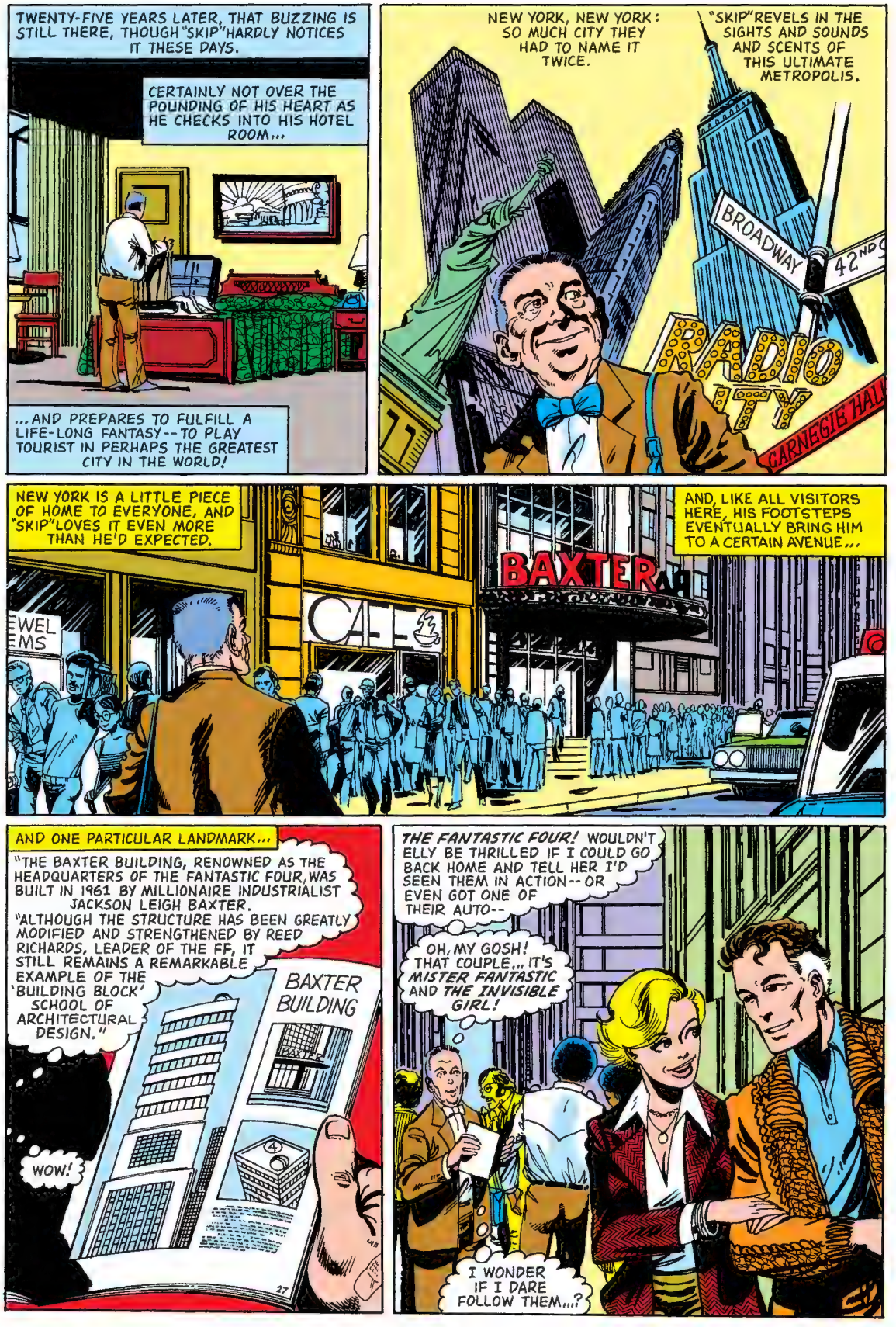
"I WAS IN SOME OF THOSE TESTS."
AND, UNBIDDEN, "SKIP'S" MIND ROLLS BACK THE YEARS TO REVIEW A MUCH YOUNGER VERSION OF HIMSELF IN 1955.
NO ONE ASKS QUESTIONS IN THE ARMY, SO NO ONE ASKED WHY HIS REGIMENT WAS ON MANEUVERS IN NEVADA.

NO ONE EVEN ASKED WHEN THEY WERE TRUCKED TWO HUNDRED MILES OUT INTO THE DESERT, AND TOLD TO SIT WITH THEIR BACKS TO THE NORTH AND THEIR HANDS OVER THEIR EYES.
THERE'S A CURIOUS PICTURE: FIFTY G.I.S SQUATTING IN THE CHILL DAWN, FEELING LIKE JACKASSES, AND ALL SURE THEY'D HEARD DESERTS WERE SUPPOSED TO BE HOT.

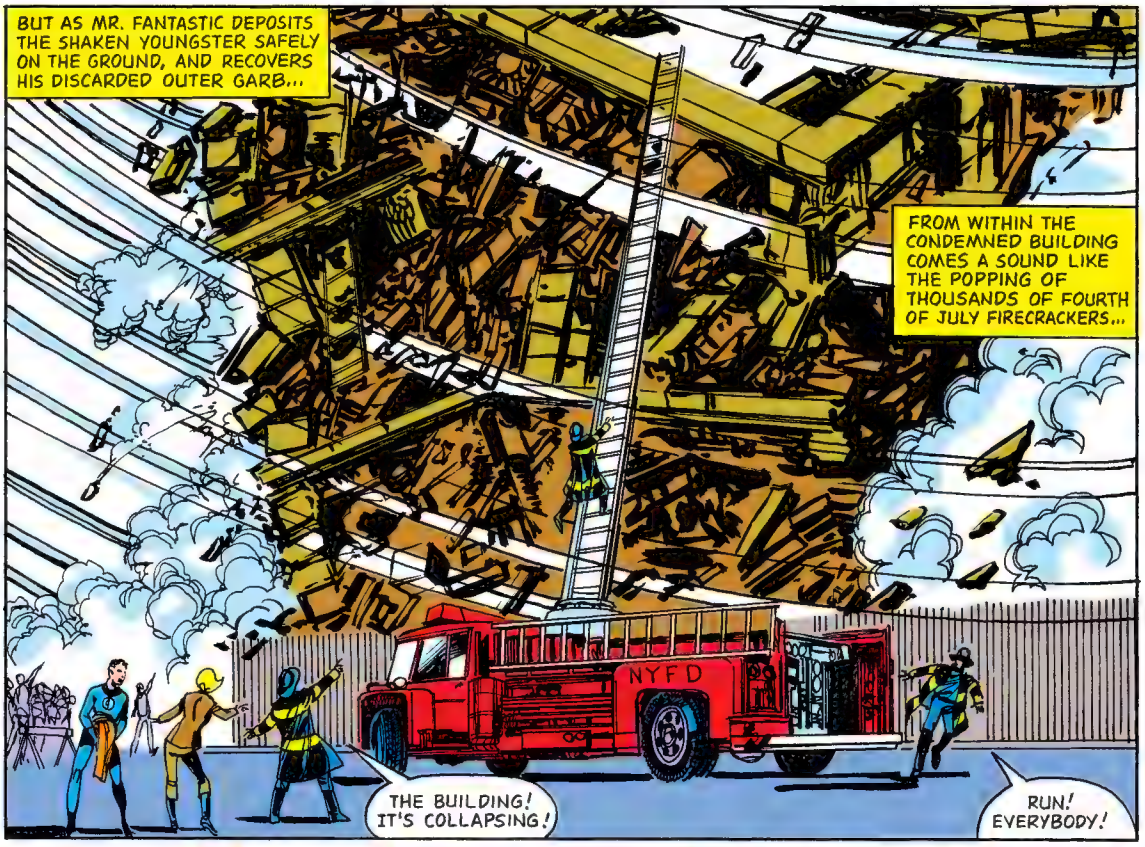

NONE OF THEM HAD THE SLIGHTEST NOTION OF JUST HOW HOT A SMALL PART OF THAT DESERT WAS ABOUT TO BECOME...
...AS SOMEONE, SOMEWHERE, PRESSED A BUTTON...
...AND FOR JUST A MOMENT THE GATES OF HADES YAWNED WIDE...


THE LIGHT HIT THEM FIRST. THAT AWFUL, SEARING LIGHT, SO BRIGHT THAT FOR ONE TERRIFYING INSTANT, THROUGH HIS TIGHTLY CLOSED EYELIDS, "SKIP" COLLINS SAW THE BONES OF HIS FINGERS ETCHED AGAINST THE GLARE.
THEN CAME THE HEAT, AND THE AWFUL, ENDLESS BLAST OF SOUND, LIKE ALL THE BOMBS IN THE WORLD EXPLODING AT ONCE.


BUT THE WORST CAME OVER THE NEXT FEW WEEKS, AS HE AND THE OTHERS IN HIS PLATOON WERE SUBJECTED TO ALL MANNER OF MYSTIFYING AND EMBARASSING EXAMINATIONS.
INCLUDING THAT PANEL, WITH THAT DOCTOR ASKING THOSE DUMB QUESTIONS.
EVENTUALLY THEY WERE ALL PASSED AS UN- AFFECTED.
"SKIP" HAD DECIDED NOT TO TELL THEM ABOUT THE ODD BUZZING HE'D DEVELOPED IN THE BACK OF HIS SKULL...

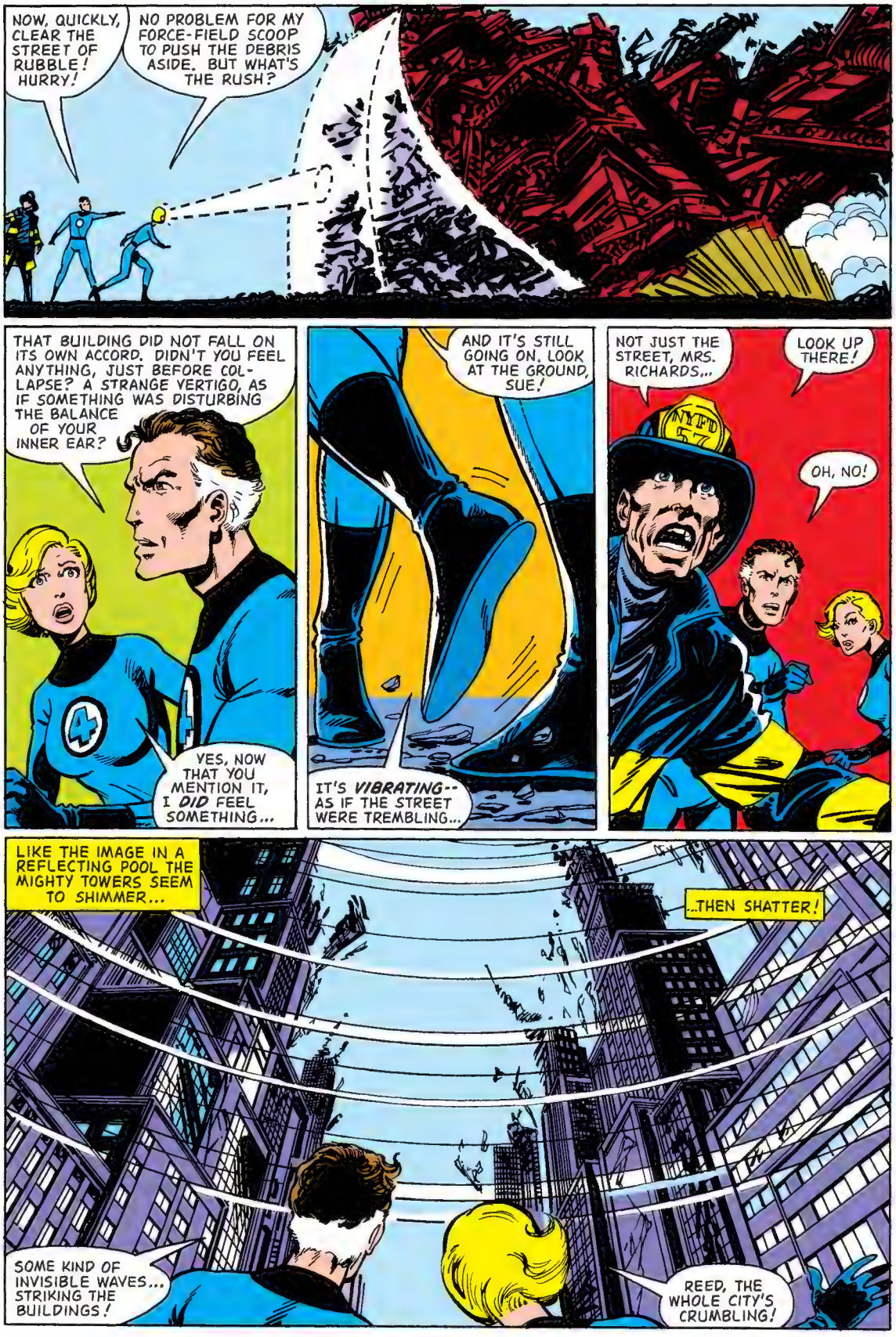

TWENTY-FIVE YEARS LATER, THAT BUZZING IS STILL THERE, THOUGH "SKIP" HARDLY NOTICES IT THESE DAYS.
CERTAINLY NOT OVER THE POUNDING OF HIS HEART AS HE CHECKS INTO HIS HOTEL ROOM...
...AND PREPARES TO FULFILL A LIFE-LONG FANTASY--TO PLAY TOURIST IN PERHAPS THE GREATEST CITY IN THE WORLD!
NEW YORK, NEW YORK: SO MUCH CITY THEY HAD TO NAME IT TWICE.
"SKIP" REVELS IN THE SIGHTS AND SOUNDS AND SCENTS OF THIS ULTIMATE METROPOLIS.
BROADWAY
42ND
RADIO
TV
CARNEGIE HALL
NEW YORK IS A LITTLE PIECE OF HOME TO EVERYONE, AND "SKIP" LOVES IT EVEN MORE THAN HE'D EXPECTED.
AND, LIKE ALL VISITORS HERE, HIS FOOTSTEPS EVENTUALLY BRING HIM TO A CERTAIN AVENUE...
BAXTER
CAFE
AND ONE PARTICULAR LANDMARK...
"THE BAXTER BUILDING, RENOWNED AS THE HEADQUARTERS OF THE FANTASTIC FOUR, WAS BUILT IN 1961 BY MILLIONAIRE INDUSTRIALIST JACKSON LEIGH BAXTER.
"ALTHOUGH THE STRUCTURE HAS BEEN GREATLY MODIFIED AND STRENGTHENED BY REED RICHARDS, LEADER OF THE FF, IT STILL REMAINS A REMARKABLE EXAMPLE OF THE 'BUILDING BLOCK' SCHOOL OF ARCHITECTURAL DESIGN."
BAXTER BUILDING
WOW!
27
THE FANTASTIC FOUR! WOULDN'T ELLY BE THRILLED IF I COULD GO BACK HOME AND TELL HER I'D SEEN THEM IN ACTION--OR EVEN GOT ONE OF THEIR AUTO--
OH, MY GOSH! THAT COUPLE... IT'S MISTER FANTASTIC AND THE INVISIBLE GIRL!
I WONDER IF I DARE FOLLOW THEM...?

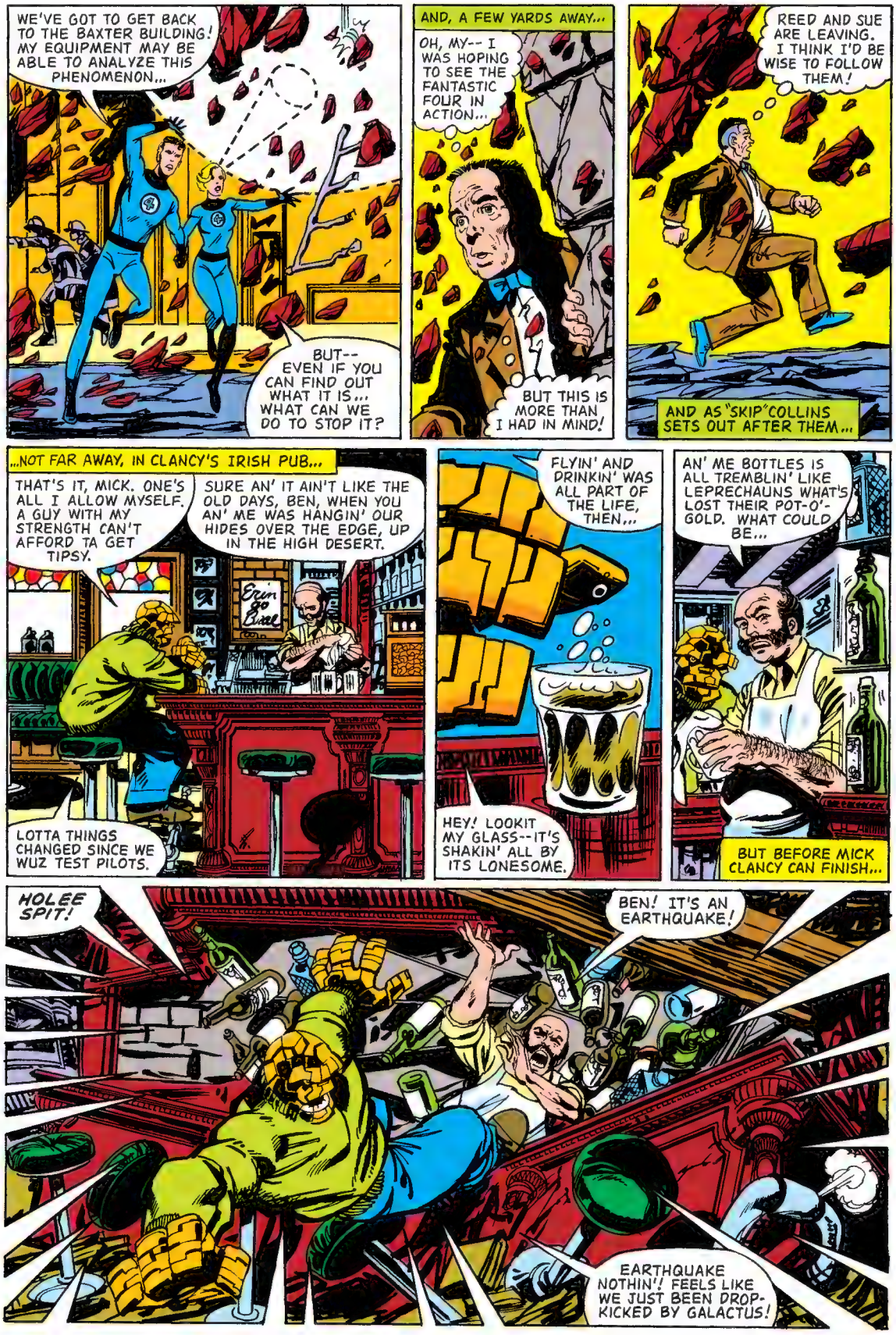
SO, FOLLOW HE DOES, FOR THE BEST PART OF AN HOUR, AS REED RICHARDS AND HIS WIFE SUSAN WEND THEIR CASUAL WAY THROUGH THE CANYONS OF NEW YORK...
UNTIL...
REED, LOOK! THAT LITTLE GIRL UP THERE!
LIKE A LIVING RED SEA THE WALL OF ONLOOKERS PARTS BEFORE THE FAMOUS COUPLE, AND...
FIREMAN! IS THERE ANYTHING WE CAN DO?
MISTER FANTASTIC! THE INVISIBLE GIRL! BOY, AM I GLAD TO SEE YOU. THAT BUILDING IS SCHEDULED TO BE DEMOLISHED TODAY.
THE WHOLE THING IS READY TO FALL DOWN IF ANYONE SO MUCH AS BLOWS ON IT.
SOME OF HER FRIENDS DARED THAT GIRL TO GO INSIDE. SOMEHOW SHE GOT PAST THE SECURITY GUARDS AND CLIMBED OUT ON THAT LEDGE. NOW SHE'S TOO SCARED TO JUMP TO MY MAN UP THERE, AND WE CAN'T MANEUVER CLOSE ENOUGH TO JUST GRAB HER.
PLEASE, HONEY, JUST JUMP! I'LL CATCH YOU!
SAY NO MORE, CHIEF. LEAVE IT TO ME.
A SURGE OF ENERGY RIPPLES THROUGH HIS COSMIC RAY-ALTERED CELLS, AND REED RICHARD'S ELASTIC FORM STRETCHES OUT...
HOLEE..!
AND NOT A MOMENT TOO SOON!
THE LEDGE! IT'S CRUMBLING UNDER HER WEIGHT!
DON'T WORRY! I'VE GOT YOU!
THERE NOW, YOU'LL BE ALRIGHT-- PROVIDED YOU DON'T GO PLAYING ANY-WHERE ELSE YOU'RE NOT SUPPOSED TO.
I-- I WON'T!

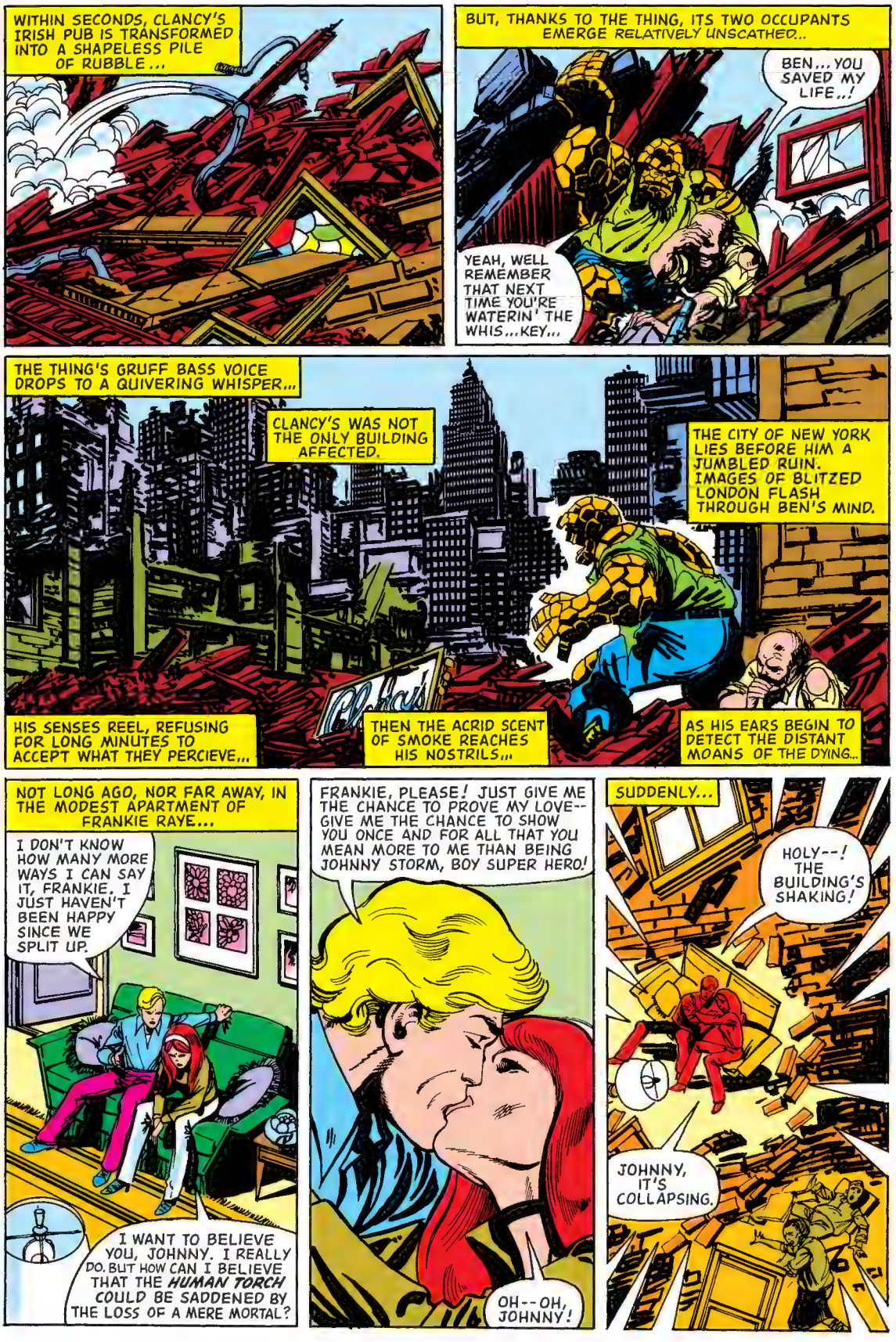

BUT AS MR. FANTASTIC DEPOSITS THE SHAKEN YOUNGSTER SAFELY ON THE GROUND, AND RECOVERS HIS DISCARDED OUTER GARB...
FROM WITHIN THE CONDEMNED BUILDING COMES A SOUND LIKE THE POPPING OF THOUSANDS OF FOURTH OF JULY FIRECRACKERS...
NYFD
THE BUILDING! IT'S COLLAPSING!
RUN! EVERYBODY!

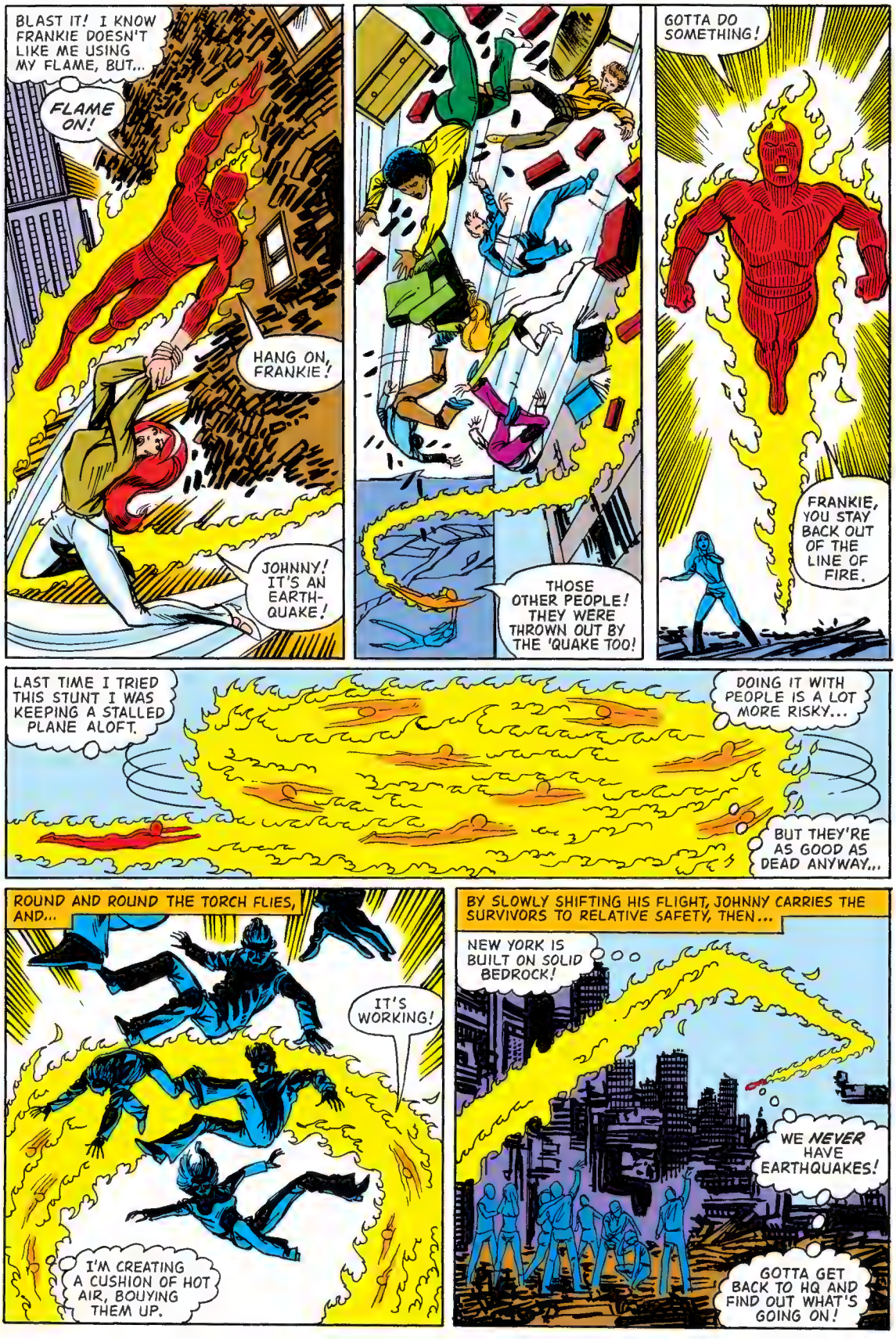
THERE'S NO WAY EVERYONE COULD GET CLEAR IN TIME-- THE DEBRIS WILL COVER MOST OF THE BLOCK.
BUT NOT IF I THROW UP AN INVISIBLE FORCE-FIELD...
...AT THE SAME TIME TURNING MY STREET CLOTHES INVISIBLE AND MY COSTUME UNDER THEM VISIBLE.

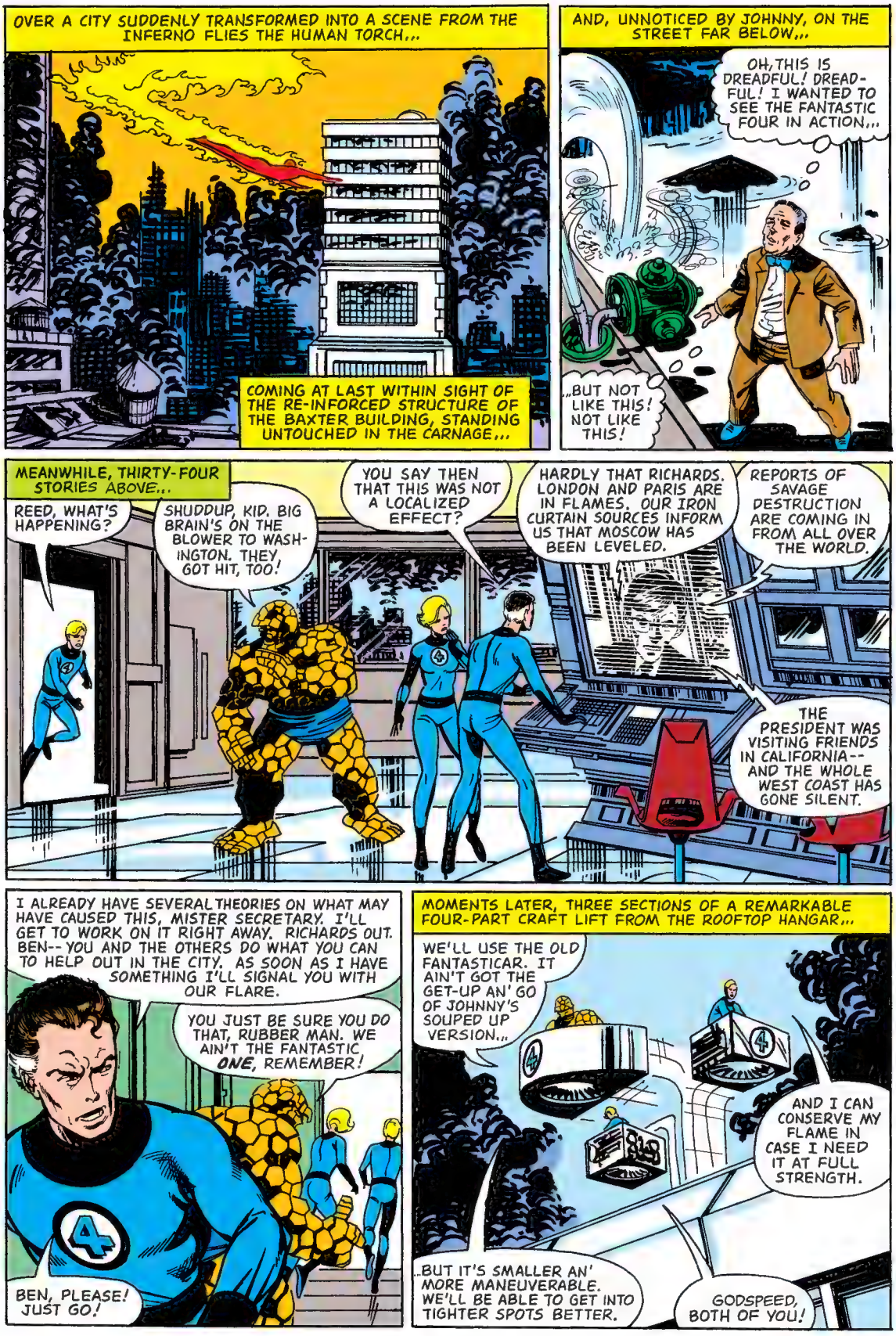
LIKE SOMETHING FROM A MADMAN'S DREAM, AN IMPOSSIBLE TIDAL WAVE OF STONE AND STEEL HURTLES TORWARDS THE ONLOOKERS...
BUT DOES NOT REACH THEM...
SHOOM
YOU DID IT, SUE. YOUR FORCEFIELD STOPPED IT!

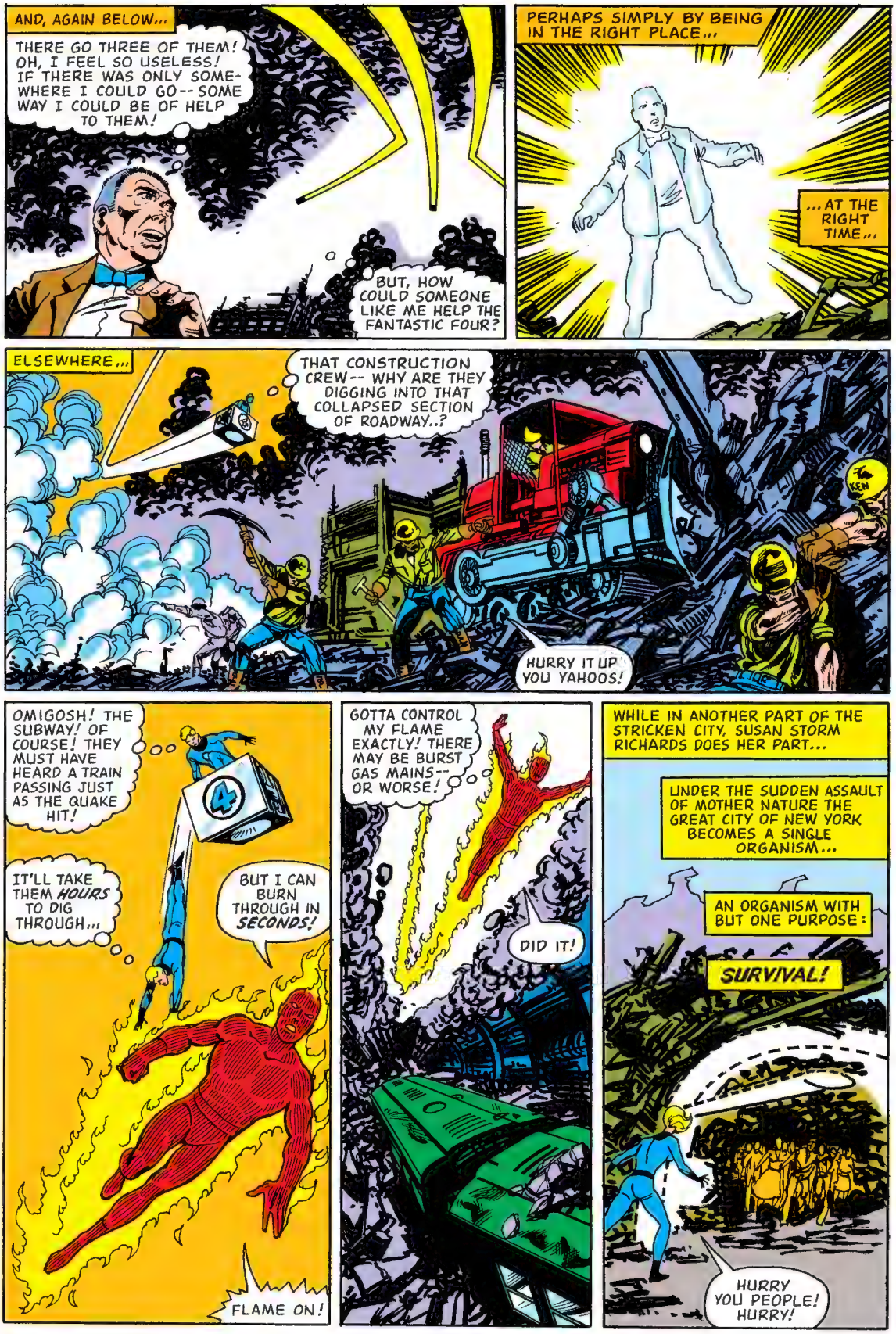

NOW, QUICKLY, CLEAR THE STREET OF RUBBLE! HURRY!
NO PROBLEM FOR MY FORCE-FIELD SCOOP TO PUSH THE DEBRIS ASIDE. BUT WHAT'S THE RUSH?
THAT BUILDING DID NOT FALL ON ITS OWN ACCORD. DIDN'T YOU FEEL ANYTHING, JUST BEFORE COL-LAPSE? A STRANGE VERTIGO, AS IF SOMETHING WAS DISTURBING THE BALANCE OF YOUR INNER EAR?
YES, NOW THAT YOU MENTION IT, I DID FEEL SOMETHING...
AND IT'S STILL GOING ON. LOOK AT THE GROUND, SUE!
IT'S VIBRATING-- AS IF THE STREET WERE TREMBLING...
NOT JUST THE STREET, MRS. RICHARDS...
LOOK UP THERE!
OH, NO!
LIKE THE IMAGE IN A REFLECTING POOL THE MIGHTY TOWERS SEEM TO SHIMMER...
...THEN SHATTER!
SOME KIND OF INVISIBLE WAVES... STRIKING THE BUILDINGS!
REED, THE WHOLE CITY'S CRUMBLING!

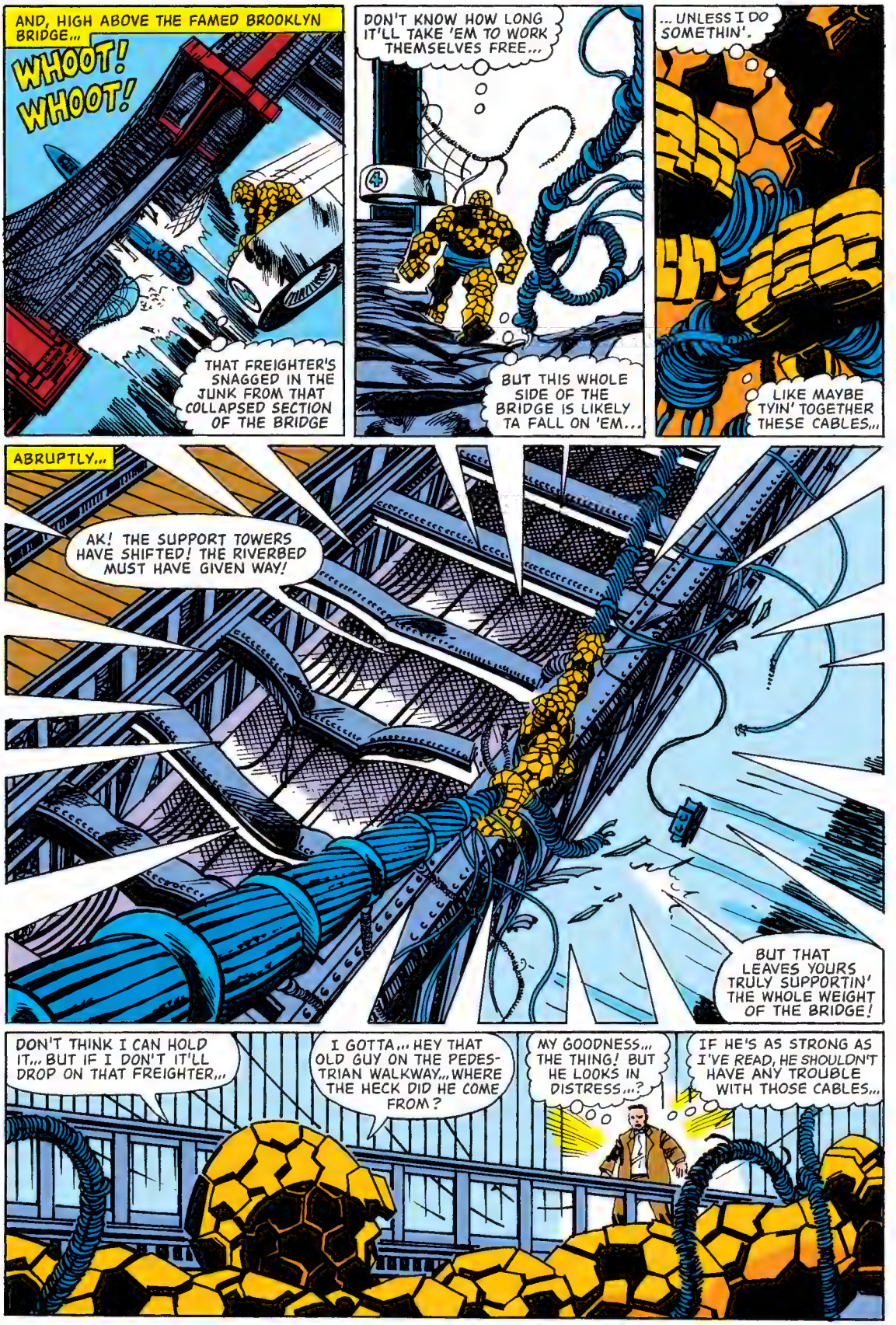

WE'VE GOT TO GET BACK TO THE BAXTER BUILDING! MY EQUIPMENT MAY BE ABLE TO ANALYZE THIS PHENOMENON...
BUT-- EVEN IF YOU CAN FIND OUT WHAT IT IS... WHAT CAN WE DO TO STOP IT?
AND, A FEW YARDS AWAY...
OH, MY-- I WAS HOPING TO SEE THE FANTASTIC FOUR IN ACTION...
BUT THIS IS MORE THAN I HAD IN MIND!
REED AND SUE ARE LEAVING. I THINK I'D BE WISE TO FOLLOW THEM!
AND AS "SKIP" COLLINS SETS OUT AFTER THEM...
...NOT FAR AWAY, IN CLANCY'S IRISH PUB...
THAT'S IT, MICK. ONE'S ALL I ALLOW MYSELF. A GUY WITH MY STRENGTH CAN'T AFFORD TA GET TIPSY.
SURE AN' IT AIN'T LIKE THE OLD DAYS, BEN, WHEN YOU AN' ME WAS HANGIN' OUR HIDES OVER THE EDGE, UP IN THE HIGH DESERT.
LOTTA THINGS CHANGED SINCE WE WUZ TEST PILOTS.
FLYIN' AND DRINKIN' WAS ALL PART OF THE LIFE, THEN...
HEY! LOOKIT MY GLASS--IT'S SHAKIN' ALL BY ITS LONESOME.
AN' ME BOTTLES IS ALL TREMBLIN' LIKE LEPRECHAUNS WHAT'S LOST THEIR POT-O'-GOLD. WHAT COULD BE...
BUT BEFORE MICK CLANCY CAN FINISH...
HOLEE SPIT!
BEN! IT'S AN EARTHQUAKE!
EARTHQUAKE NOTHIN'! FEELS LIKE WE JUST BEEN DROP-KICKED BY GALACTUS!

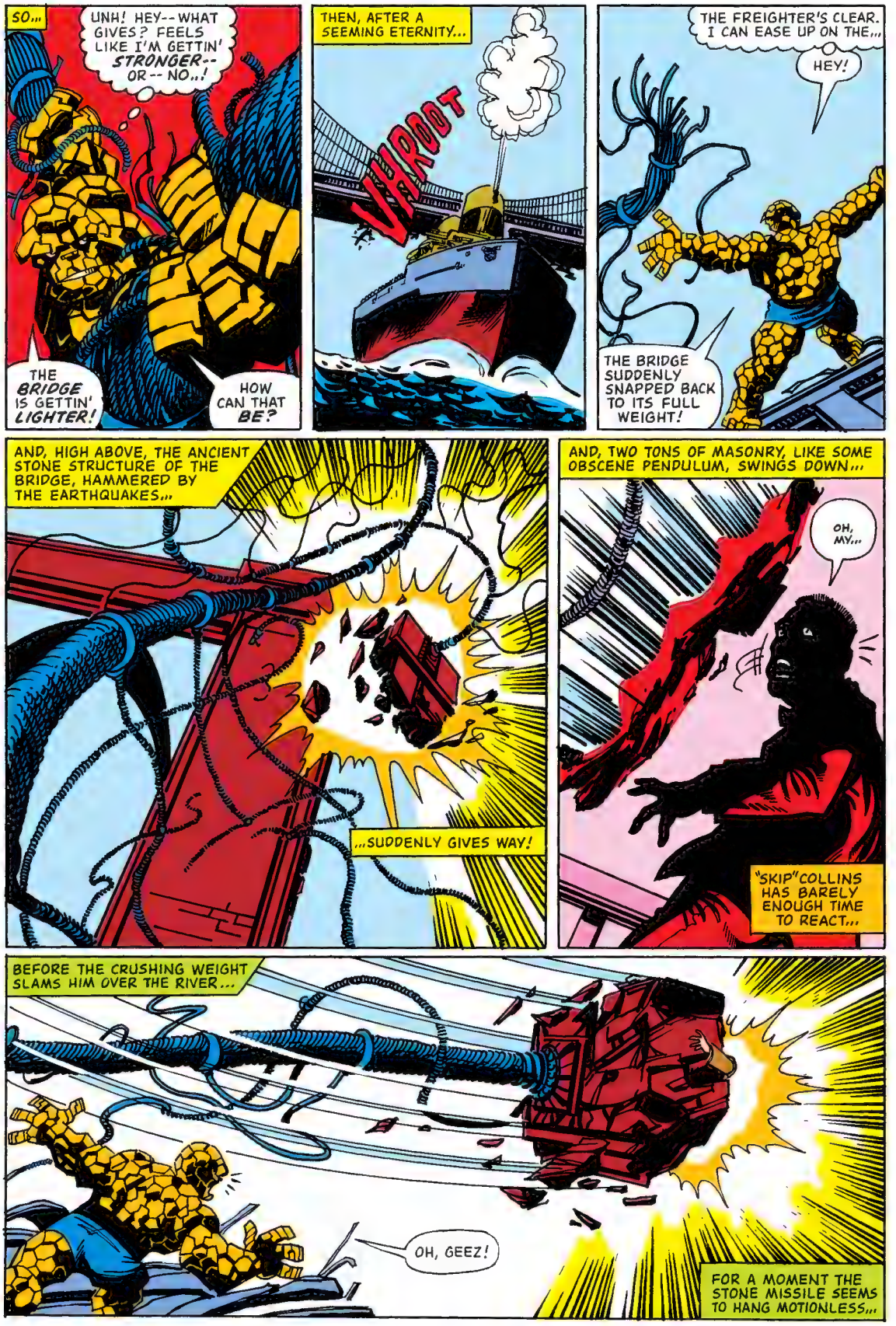

WITHIN SECONDS, CLANCY'S IRISH PUB IS TRANSFORMED INTO A SHAPELESS PILE OF RUBBLE...
BUT, THANKS TO THE THING, ITS TWO OCCUPANTS EMERGE RELATIVELY UNSCATHED...
BEN... YOU SAVED MY LIFE...!
YEAH, WELL REMEMBER THAT NEXT TIME YOU'RE WATERIN' THE WHIS...KEY...
THE THING'S GRUFF BASS VOICE DROPS TO A QUIVERING WHISPER...
CLANCY'S WAS NOT THE ONLY BUILDING AFFECTED.
THE CITY OF NEW YORK LIES BEFORE HIM A JUMBLED RUIN. IMAGES OF BLITZED LONDON FLASH THROUGH BEN'S MIND.
HIS SENSES REEL, REFUSING FOR LONG MINUTES TO ACCEPT WHAT THEY PERCIEVE...
THEN THE ACRID SCENT OF SMOKE REACHES HIS NOSTRILS...
AS HIS EARS BEGIN TO DETECT THE DISTANT MOANS OF THE DYING...
NOT LONG AGO, NOR FAR AWAY, IN THE MODEST APARTMENT OF FRANKIE RAYE...
I DON'T KNOW HOW MANY MORE WAYS I CAN SAY IT, FRANKIE. I JUST HAVEN'T BEEN HAPPY SINCE WE SPLIT UP.
I WANT TO BELIEVE YOU, JOHNNY. I REALLY DO. BUT HOW CAN I BELIEVE THAT THE HUMAN TORCH COULD BE SADDENED BY THE LOSS OF A MERE MORTAL?
FRANKIE, PLEASE! JUST GIVE ME THE CHANCE TO PROVE MY LOVE-- GIVE ME THE CHANCE TO SHOW YOU ONCE AND FOR ALL THAT YOU MEAN MORE TO ME THAN BEING JOHNNY STORM, BOY SUPER HERO!
OH--OH, JOHNNY!
SUDDENLY...
HOLY--! THE BUILDING'S SHAKING!
JOHNNY, IT'S COLLAPSING.

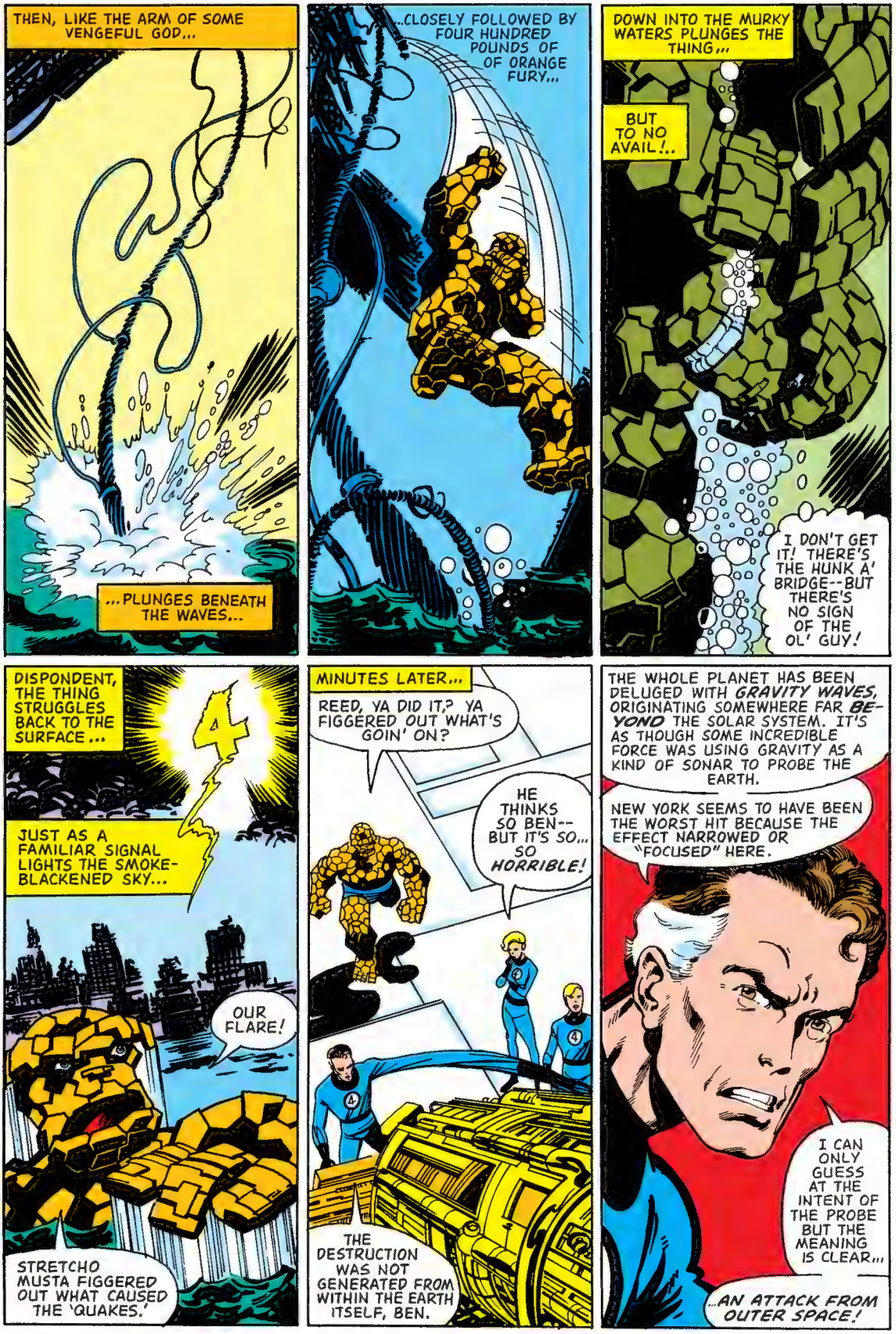

BLAST IT! I KNOW FRANKIE DOESN'T LIKE ME USING MY FLAME, BUT...
FLAME ON!
HANG ON, FRANKIE!
JOHNNY! IT'S AN EARTH-QUAKE!
THOSE OTHER PEOPLE! THEY WERE THROWN OUT BY THE 'QUAKE TOO!
GOTTA DO SOMETHING!
FRANKIE, YOU STAY BACK OUT OF THE LINE OF FIRE.
LAST TIME I TRIED THIS STUNT I WAS KEEPING A STALLED PLANE ALOFT.
DOING IT WITH PEOPLE IS A LOT MORE RISKY...
BUT THEY'RE AS GOOD AS DEAD ANYWAY...
ROUND AND ROUND THE TORCH FLIES, AND...
IT'S WORKING!
I'M CREATING A CUSHION OF HOT AIR, BOUYING THEM UP.
BY SLOWLY SHIFTING HIS FLIGHT, JOHNNY CARRIES THE SURVIVORS TO RELATIVE SAFETY, THEN...
NEW YORK IS BUILT ON SOLID BEDROCK!
WE NEVER HAVE EARTHQUAKES!
GOTTA GET BACK TO HQ AND FIND OUT WHAT'S GOING ON!

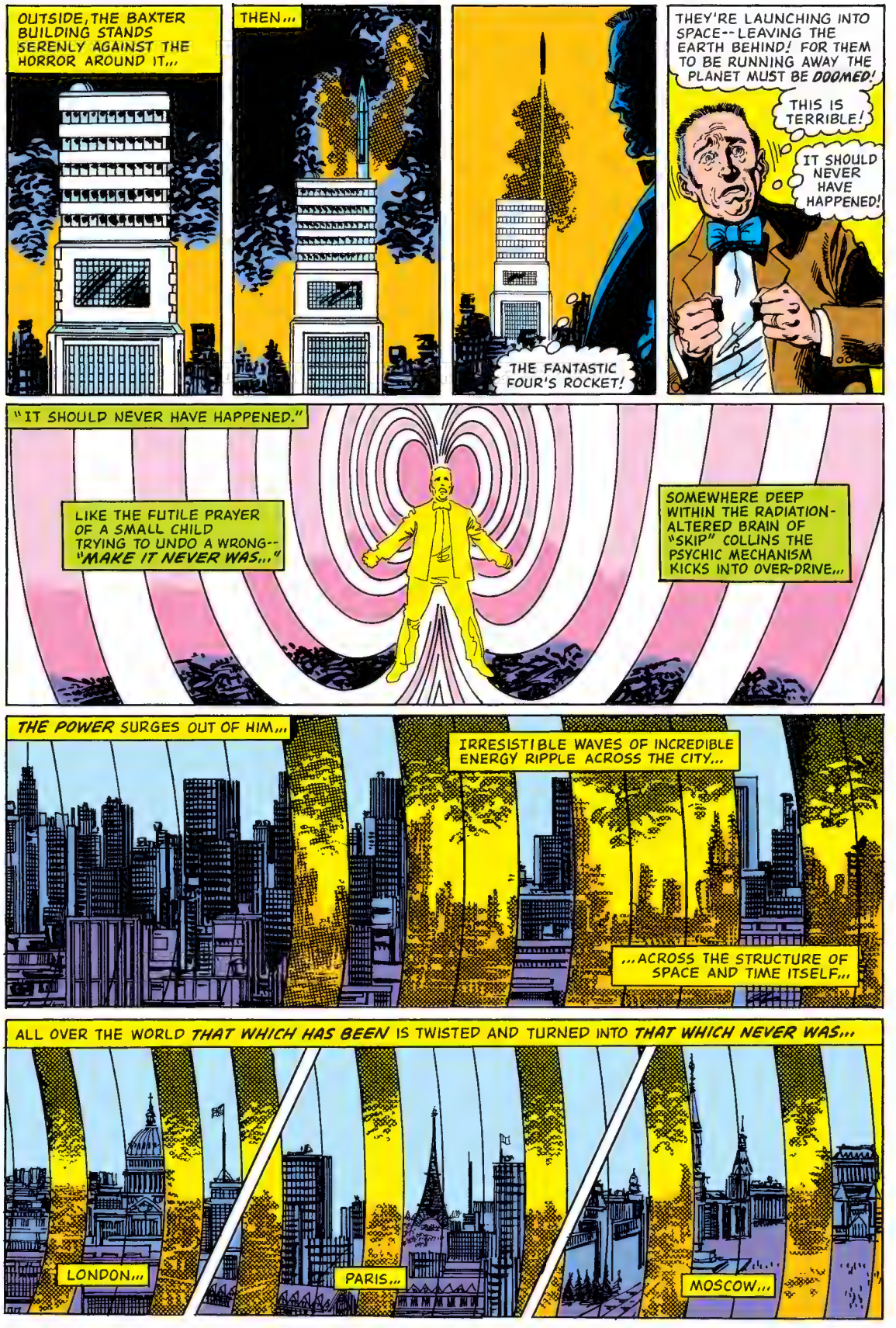

OVER A CITY SUDDENLY TRANSFORMED INTO A SCENE FROM THE INFERNO FLIES THE HUMAN TORCH...
COMING AT LAST WITHIN SIGHT OF THE RE-INFORCED STRUCTURE OF THE BAXTER BUILDING, STANDING UNTOUCHED IN THE CARNAGE...
AND, UNNOTICED BY JOHNNY, ON THE STREET FAR BELOW...
OH, THIS IS DREADFUL! DREADFUL! I WANTED TO SEE THE FANTASTIC FOUR IN ACTION...
...BUT NOT LIKE THIS! NOT LIKE THIS!
MEANWHILE, THIRTY-FOUR STORIES ABOVE...
REED, WHAT'S HAPPENING?
SHUDDUP, KID. BIG BRAIN'S ON THE BLOWER TO WASHINGTON. THEY GOT HIT, TOO!
YOU SAY THEN THAT THIS WAS NOT A LOCALIZED EFFECT?
HARDLY THAT RICHARDS. LONDON AND PARIS ARE IN FLAMES. OUR IRON CURTAIN SOURCES INFORM US THAT MOSCOW HAS BEEN LEVELED.
REPORTS OF SAVAGE DESTRUCTION ARE COMING IN FROM ALL OVER THE WORLD.
THE PRESIDENT WAS VISITING FRIENDS IN CALIFORNIA-- AND THE WHOLE WEST COAST HAS GONE SILENT.
I ALREADY HAVE SEVERAL THEORIES ON WHAT MAY HAVE CAUSED THIS, MISTER SECRETARY. I'LL GET TO WORK ON IT RIGHT AWAY. RICHARDS OUT. BEN-- YOU AND THE OTHERS DO WHAT YOU CAN TO HELP OUT IN THE CITY. AS SOON AS I HAVE SOMETHING I'LL SIGNAL YOU WITH OUR FLARE.
YOU JUST BE SURE YOU DO THAT, RUBBER MAN. WE AIN'T THE FANTASTIC ONE, REMEMBER!
BEN, PLEASE! JUST GO!
MOMENTS LATER, THREE SECTIONS OF A REMARKABLE FOUR-PART CRAFT LIFT FROM THE ROOFTOP HANGAR...
WE'LL USE THE OLD FANTASTICAR. IT AIN'T GOT THE GET-UP AN' GO OF JOHNNY'S SOUPED UP VERSION...
AND I CAN CONSERVE MY FLAME IN CASE I NEED IT AT FULL STRENGTH.
...BUT IT'S SMALLER AN' MORE MANEUVERABLE. WE'LL BE ABLE TO GET INTO TIGHTER SPOTS BETTER.
GODSPEED, BOTH OF YOU!

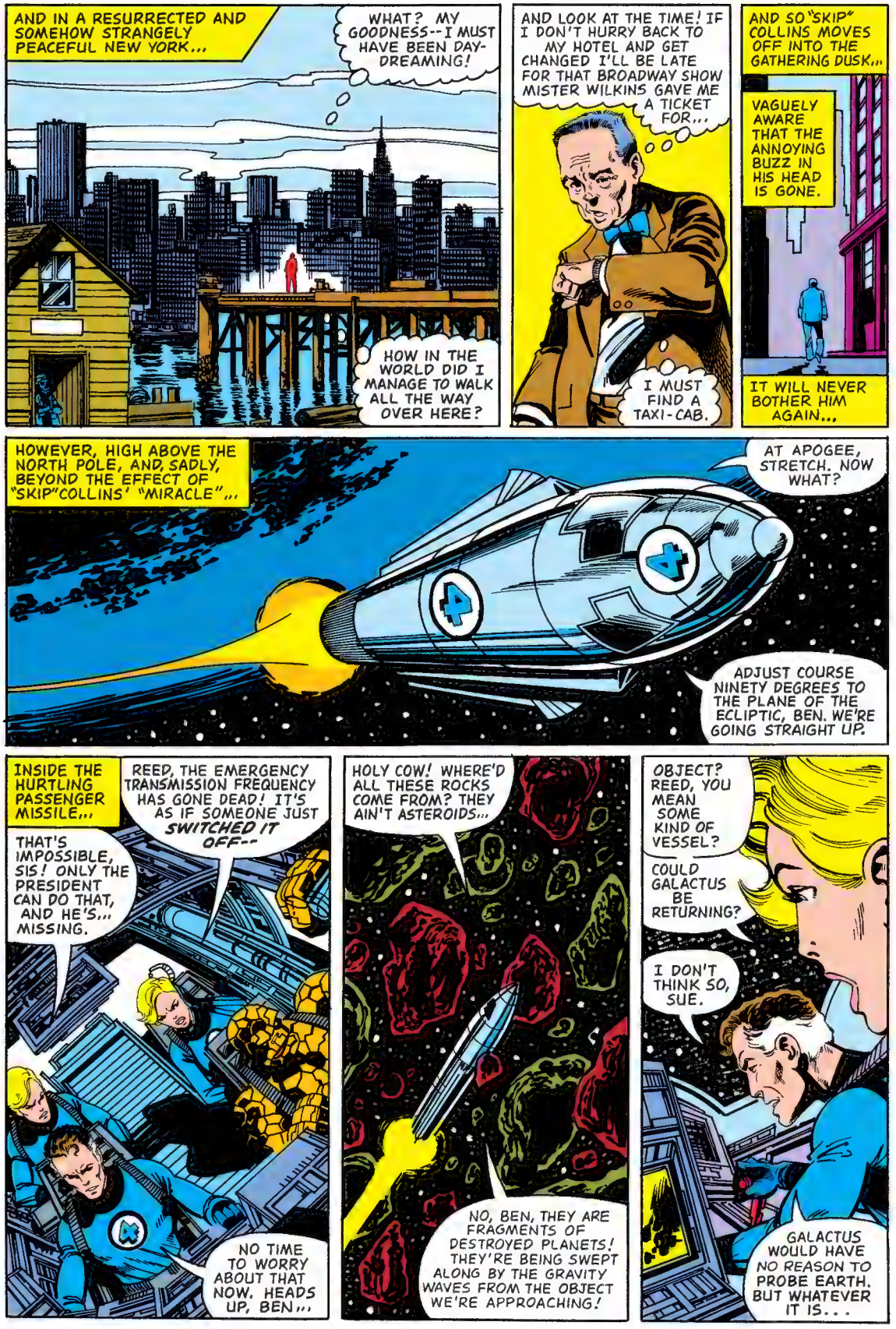

AND, AGAIN BELOW...
THERE GO THREE OF THEM! OH, I FEEL SO USELESS! IF THERE WAS ONLY SOMEWHERE I COULD GO-- SOMEWAY I COULD BE OF HELP TO THEM!
BUT, HOW COULD SOMEONE LIKE ME HELP THE FANTASTIC FOUR?
PERHAPS SIMPLY BY BEING IN THE RIGHT PLACE...
...AT THE RIGHT TIME...
ELSEWHERE...
THAT CONSTRUCTION CREW-- WHY ARE THEY DIGGING INTO THAT COLLAPSED SECTION OF ROADWAY..?
HURRY IT UP YOU YAHOOS!
OMIGOSH! THE SUBWAY! OF COURSE! THEY MUST HAVE HEARD A TRAIN PASSING JUST AS THE QUAKE HIT!
IT'LL TAKE THEM HOURS TO DIG THROUGH...
BUT I CAN BURN THROUGH IN SECONDS!
FLAME ON!
GOTTA CONTROL MY FLAME EXACTLY! THERE MAY BE BURST GAS MAINS-- OR WORSE!
DID IT!
WHILE IN ANOTHER PART OF THE STRICKEN CITY, SUSAN STORM RICHARDS DOES HER PART...
UNDER THE SUDDEN ASSAULT OF MOTHER NATURE THE GREAT CITY OF NEW YORK BECOMES A SINGLE ORGANISM...
AN ORGANISM WITH BUT ONE PURPOSE:
SURVIVAL!
HURRY YOU PEOPLE! HURRY!

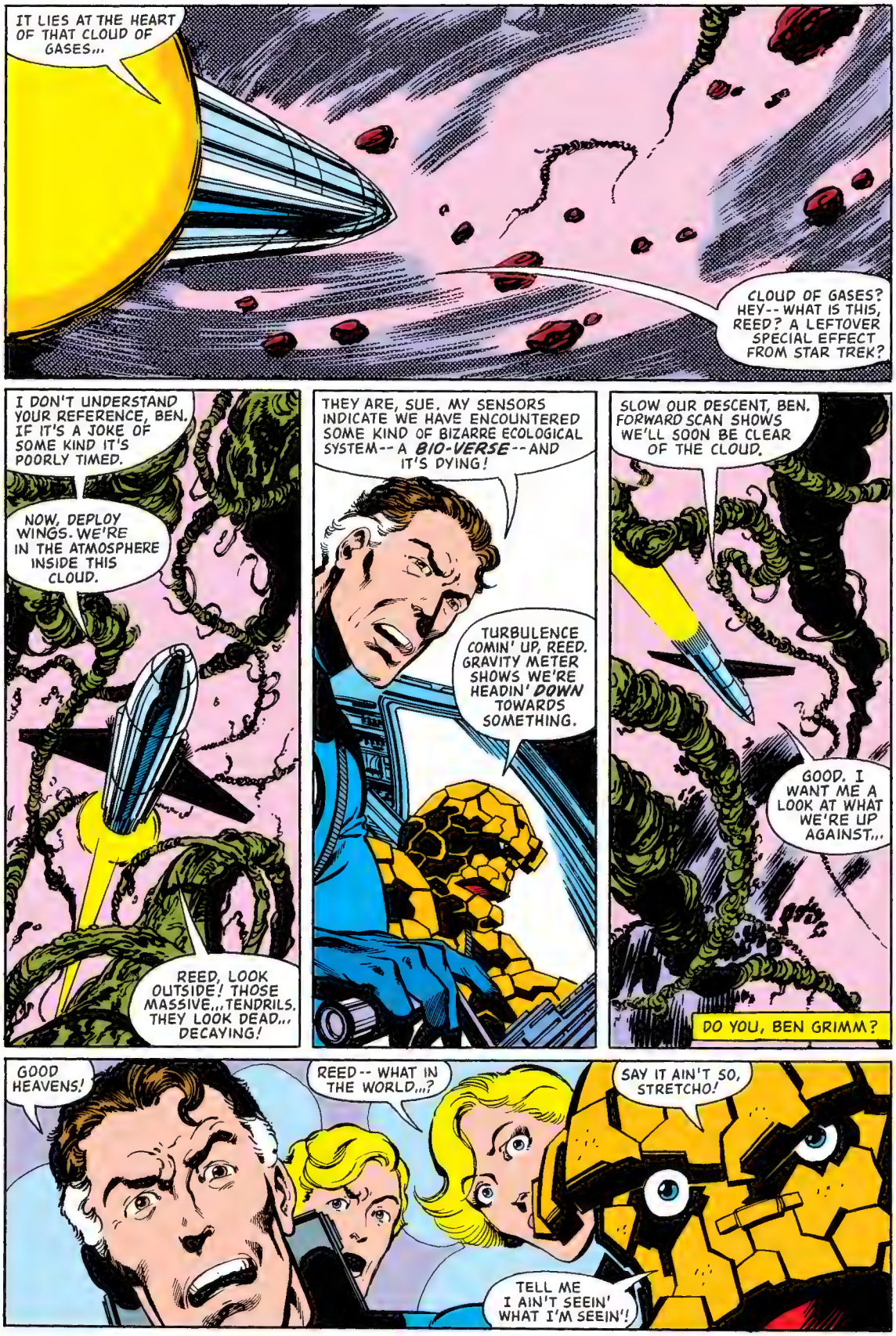

AND, HIGH ABOVE THE FAMED BROOKLYN BRIDGE...
WHOOT! WHOOT!
THAT FREIGHTER'S SNAGGED IN THE JUNK FROM THAT COLLAPSED SECTION OF THE BRIDGE
DON'T KNOW HOW LONG IT'LL TAKE 'EM TO WORK THEMSELVES FREE...
BUT THIS WHOLE SIDE OF THE BRIDGE IS LIKELY TA FALL ON 'EM...
... UNLESS I DO SOMETHIN'.
LIKE MAYBE TYIN' TOGETHER THESE CABLES...
ABRUPTLY...
AK! THE SUPPORT TOWERS HAVE SHIFTED! THE RIVERBED MUST HAVE GIVEN WAY!
BUT THAT LEAVES YOURS TRULY SUPPORTIN' THE WHOLE WEIGHT OF THE BRIDGE!
DON'T THINK I CAN HOLD IT... BUT IF I DON'T IT'LL DROP ON THAT FREIGHTER...
I GOTTA... HEY THAT OLD GUY ON THE PEDESTRIAN WALKWAY... WHERE THE HECK DID HE COME FROM?
MY GOODNESS... THE THING! BUT HE LOOKS IN DISTRESS...?
IF HE'S AS STRONG AS I'VE READ, HE SHOULDN'T HAVE ANY TROUBLE WITH THOSE CABLES...

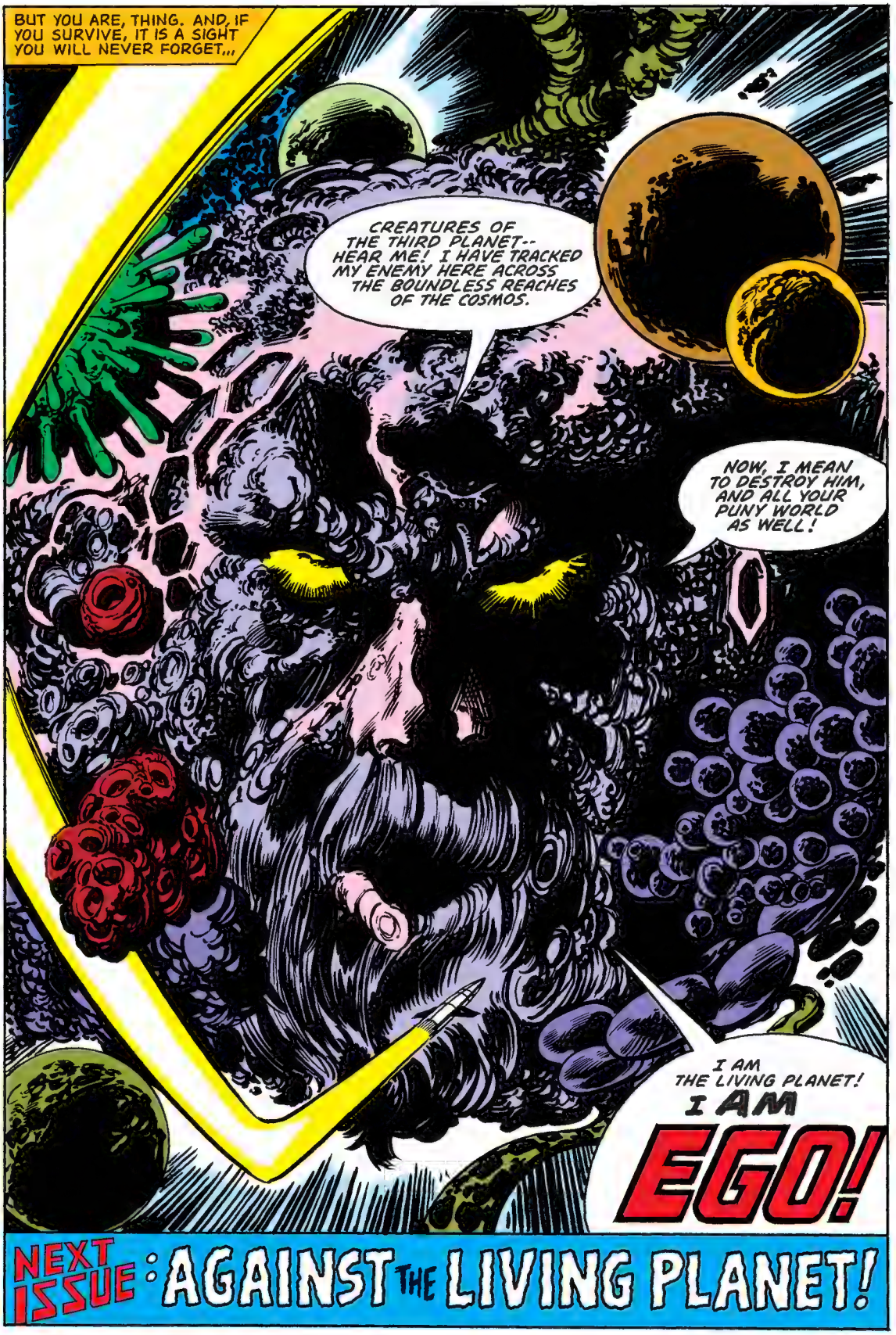

SO...
UNH! HEY--WHAT GIVES? FEELS LIKE I'M GETTIN' STRONGER-- OR-- NO...!
THE BRIDGE IS GETTIN' LIGHTER!
HOW CAN THAT BE?
THEN, AFTER A SEEMING ETERNITY...
VROOT
THE FREIGHTER'S CLEAR. I CAN EASE UP ON THE...
HEY!
THE BRIDGE SUDDENLY SNAPPED BACK TO ITS FULL WEIGHT!
AND, HIGH ABOVE, THE ANCIENT STONE STRUCTURE OF THE BRIDGE, HAMMERED BY THE EARTHQUAKES...
...SUDDENLY GIVES WAY!
AND, TWO TONS OF MASONRY, LIKE SOME OBSCENE PENDULUM, SWINGS DOWN...
OH, MY...
"SKIP" COLLINS HAS BARELY ENOUGH TIME TO REACT...
BEFORE THE CRUSHING WEIGHT SLAMS HIM OVER THE RIVER...
OH, GEEZ!
FOR A MOMENT THE STONE MISSILE SEEMS TO HANG MOTIONLESS...


THEN, LIKE THE ARM OF SOME VENGEFUL GOD...
...PLUNGES BENEATH THE WAVES...
...CLOSELY FOLLOWED BY FOUR HUNDRED POUNDS OF OF ORANGE FURY...
DOWN INTO THE MURKY WATERS PLUNGES THE THING...
BUT TO NO AVAIL!..
I DON'T GET IT! THERE'S THE HUNK A' BRIDGE--BUT THERE'S NO SIGN OF THE OL' GUY!
DISPONDENT, THE THING STRUGGLES BACK TO THE SURFACE...
JUST AS A FAMILIAR SIGNAL LIGHTS THE SMOKE-BLACKENED SKY...
OUR FLARE!
STRETCHO MUSTA FIGGERED OUT WHAT CAUSED THE 'QUAKES.'
MINUTES LATER...
REED, YA DID IT,? YA FIGGERED OUT WHAT'S GOIN' ON?
HE THINKS SO BEN-- BUT IT'S SO... SO HORRIBLE!
THE DESTRUCTION WAS NOT GENERATED FROM WITHIN THE EARTH ITSELF, BEN.
THE WHOLE PLANET HAS BEEN DELUGED WITH GRAVITY WAVES, ORIGINATING SOMEWHERE FAR BEYOND THE SOLAR SYSTEM. IT'S AS THOUGH SOME INCREDIBLE FORCE WAS USING GRAVITY AS A KIND OF SONAR TO PROBE THE EARTH.
NEW YORK SEEMS TO HAVE BEEN THE WORST HIT BECAUSE THE EFFECT NARROWED OR "FOCUSED" HERE.
I CAN ONLY GUESS AT THE INTENT OF THE PROBE BUT THE MEANING IS CLEAR...
...AN ATTACK FROM OUTER SPACE!


OUTSIDE, THE BAXTER BUILDING STANDS SERENLY AGAINST THE HORROR AROUND IT...
THEN...
THE FANTASTIC FOUR'S ROCKET!
THEY'RE LAUNCHING INTO SPACE--LEAVING THE EARTH BEHIND! FOR THEM TO BE RUNNING AWAY THE PLANET MUST BE DOOMED!
THIS IS TERRIBLE!
IT SHOULD NEVER HAVE HAPPENED!
"IT SHOULD NEVER HAVE HAPPENED."
LIKE THE FUTILE PRAYER OF A SMALL CHILD TRYING TO UNDO A WRONG-- "MAKE IT NEVER WAS..."
SOMEWHERE DEEP WITHIN THE RADIATION-ALTERED BRAIN OF "SKIP" COLLINS THE PSYCHIC MECHANISM KICKS INTO OVER-DRIVE...
THE POWER SURGES OUT OF HIM...
IRRESISTIBLE WAVES OF INCREDIBLE ENERGY RIPPLE ACROSS THE CITY...
...ACROSS THE STRUCTURE OF SPACE AND TIME ITSELF...
ALL OVER THE WORLD THAT WHICH HAS BEEN IS TWISTED AND TURNED INTO THAT WHICH NEVER WAS...
LONDON...
PARIS...
MOSCOW...


AND IN A RESURRECTED AND SOMEHOW STRANGELY PEACEFUL NEW YORK...
WHAT? MY GOODNESS--I MUST HAVE BEEN DAY-DREAMING!
HOW IN THE WORLD DID I MANAGE TO WALK ALL THE WAY OVER HERE?
AND LOOK AT THE TIME! IF I DON'T HURRY BACK TO MY HOTEL AND GET CHANGED I'LL BE LATE FOR THAT BROADWAY SHOW MISTER WILKINS GAVE ME A TICKET FOR...
I MUST FIND A TAXI-CAB.
AND SO "SKIP" COLLINS MOVES OFF INTO THE GATHERING DUSK...
VAGUELY AWARE THAT THE ANNOYING BUZZ IN HIS HEAD IS GONE.
IT WILL NEVER BOTHER HIM AGAIN...
HOWEVER, HIGH ABOVE THE NORTH POLE, AND, SADLY, BEYOND THE EFFECT OF "SKIP" COLLINS' "MIRACLE"...
AT APOGEE, STRETCH. NOW WHAT?
ADJUST COURSE NINETY DEGREES TO THE PLANE OF THE ECLIPTIC, BEN. WE'RE GOING STRAIGHT UP.
INSIDE THE HURTLING PASSENGER MISSILE...
REED, THE EMERGENCY TRANSMISSION FREQUENCY HAS GONE DEAD! IT'S AS IF SOMEONE JUST SWITCHED IT OFF--
THAT'S IMPOSSIBLE, SIS! ONLY THE PRESIDENT CAN DO THAT, AND HE'S... MISSING.
NO TIME TO WORRY ABOUT THAT NOW. HEADS UP, BEN...
HOLY COW! WHERE'D ALL THESE ROCKS COME FROM? THEY AIN'T ASTEROIDS...
NO, BEN, THEY ARE FRAGMENTS OF DESTROYED PLANETS! THEY'RE BEING SWEPT ALONG BY THE GRAVITY WAVES FROM THE OBJECT WE'RE APPROACHING!
OBJECT? REED, YOU MEAN SOME KIND OF VESSEL?
COULD GALACTUS BE RETURNING?
I DON'T THINK SO, SUE.
GALACTUS WOULD HAVE NO REASON TO PROBE EARTH. BUT WHATEVER IT IS...


IT LIES AT THE HEART OF THAT CLOUD OF GASES...
CLOUD OF GASES? HEY--WHAT IS THIS, REED? A LEFTOVER SPECIAL EFFECT FROM STAR TREK?
I DON'T UNDERSTAND YOUR REFERENCE, BEN. IF IT'S A JOKE OF SOME KIND IT'S POORLY TIMED.
NOW, DEPLOY WINGS. WE'RE IN THE ATMOSPHERE INSIDE THIS CLOUD.
REED, LOOK OUTSIDE! THOSE MASSIVE...TENDRILS. THEY LOOK DEAD... DECAYING!
THEY ARE, SUE. MY SENSORS INDICATE WE HAVE ENCOUNTERED SOME KIND OF BIZARRE ECOLOGICAL SYSTEM--A BIO-VERSE--AND IT'S DYING!
TURBULENCE COMIN' UP, REED. GRAVITY METER SHOWS WE'RE HEADIN' DOWN TOWARDS SOMETHING.
SLOW OUR DESCENT, BEN. FORWARD SCAN SHOWS WE'LL SOON BE CLEAR OF THE CLOUD.
GOOD. I WANT ME A LOOK AT WHAT WE'RE UP AGAINST...
DO YOU, BEN GRIMM?
GOOD HEAVENS!
REED--WHAT IN THE WORLD...?
SAY IT AIN'T SO, STRETCHO!
TELL ME I AIN'T SEEIN' WHAT I'M SEEIN'!


BUT YOU ARE, THING. AND, IF YOU SURVIVE, IT IS A SIGHT YOU WILL NEVER FORGET...
CREATURES OF THE THIRD PLANET-- HEAR ME! I HAVE TRACKED MY ENEMY HERE ACROSS THE BOUNDLESS REACHES OF THE COSMOS.
NOW, I MEAN TO DESTROY HIM, AND ALL YOUR PUNY WORLD AS WELL!
I AM THE LIVING PLANET!
I AM
EGO!
NEXT ISSUE: AGAINST THE LIVING PLANET!

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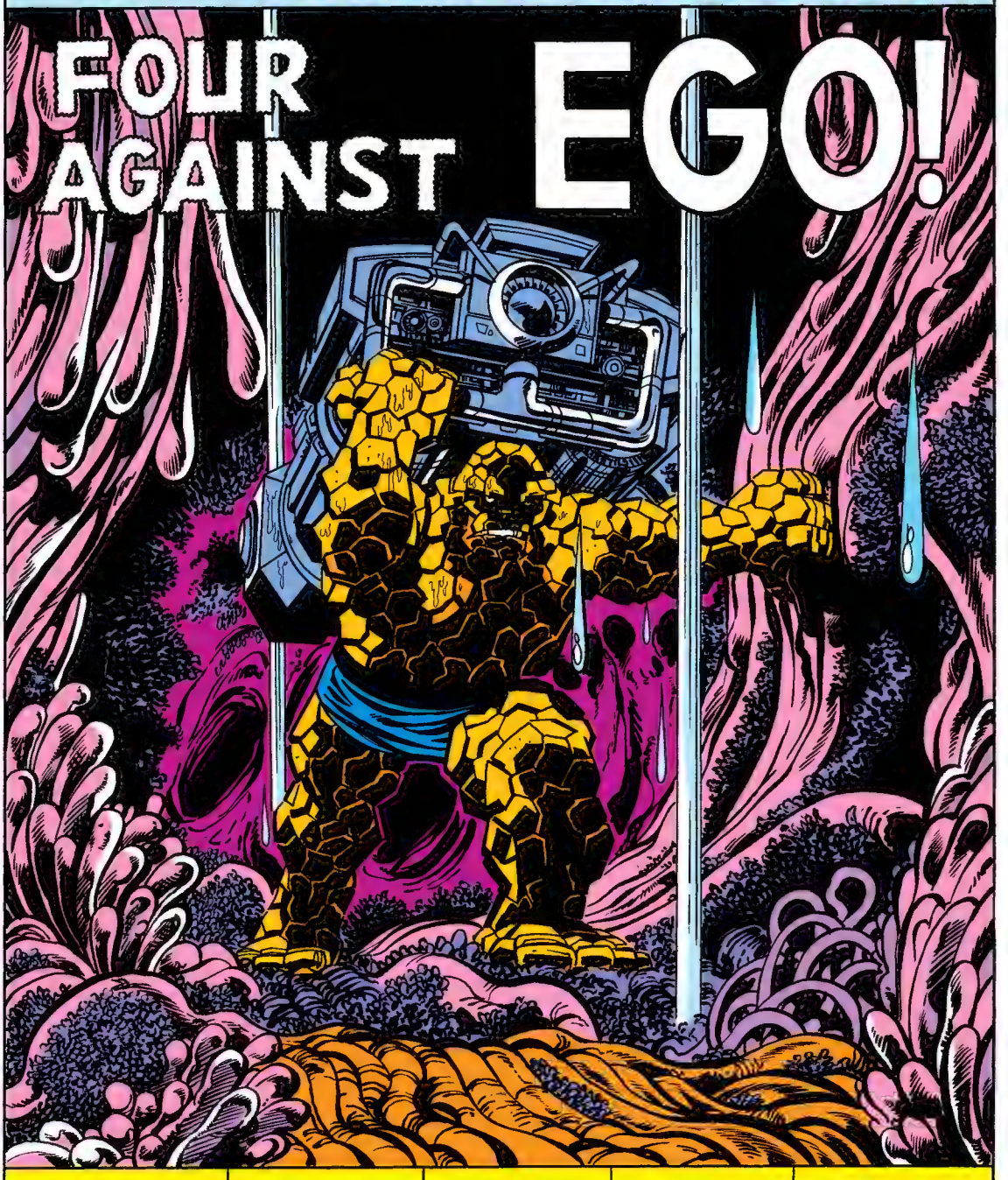
THE F.F. BATTLE THE LIVING PLANET--
EGO!
BYRNE AND AUSTIN

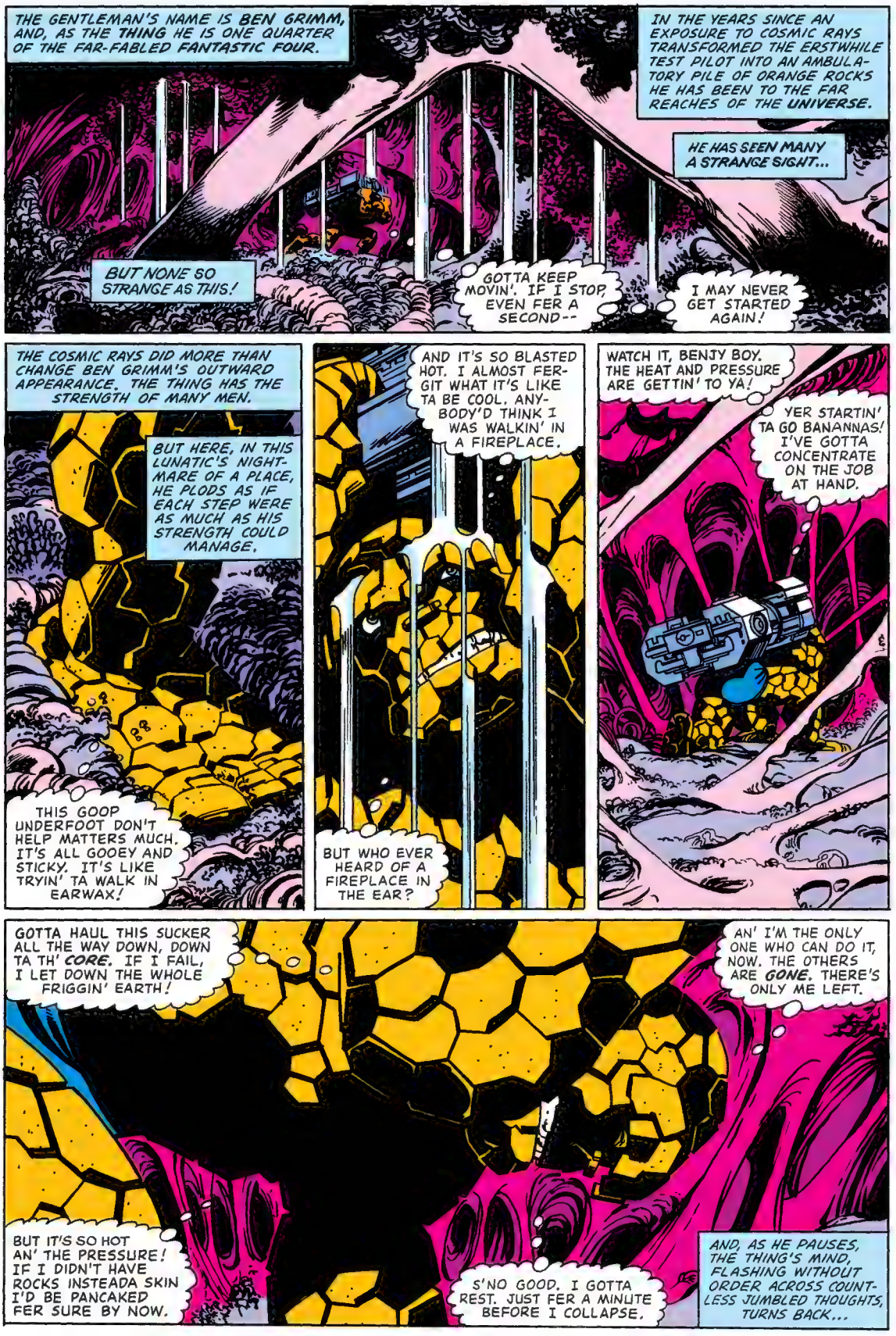
Reed Richards! Ben Grimm! Sue Richards! Johnny Storm! Together they braved the unknown terrors of outer space and were changed into something more than human! MR. FANTASTIC! THE THING! THE INVISIBLE GIRL! THE HUMAN TORCH! And now the world will never again be the same!

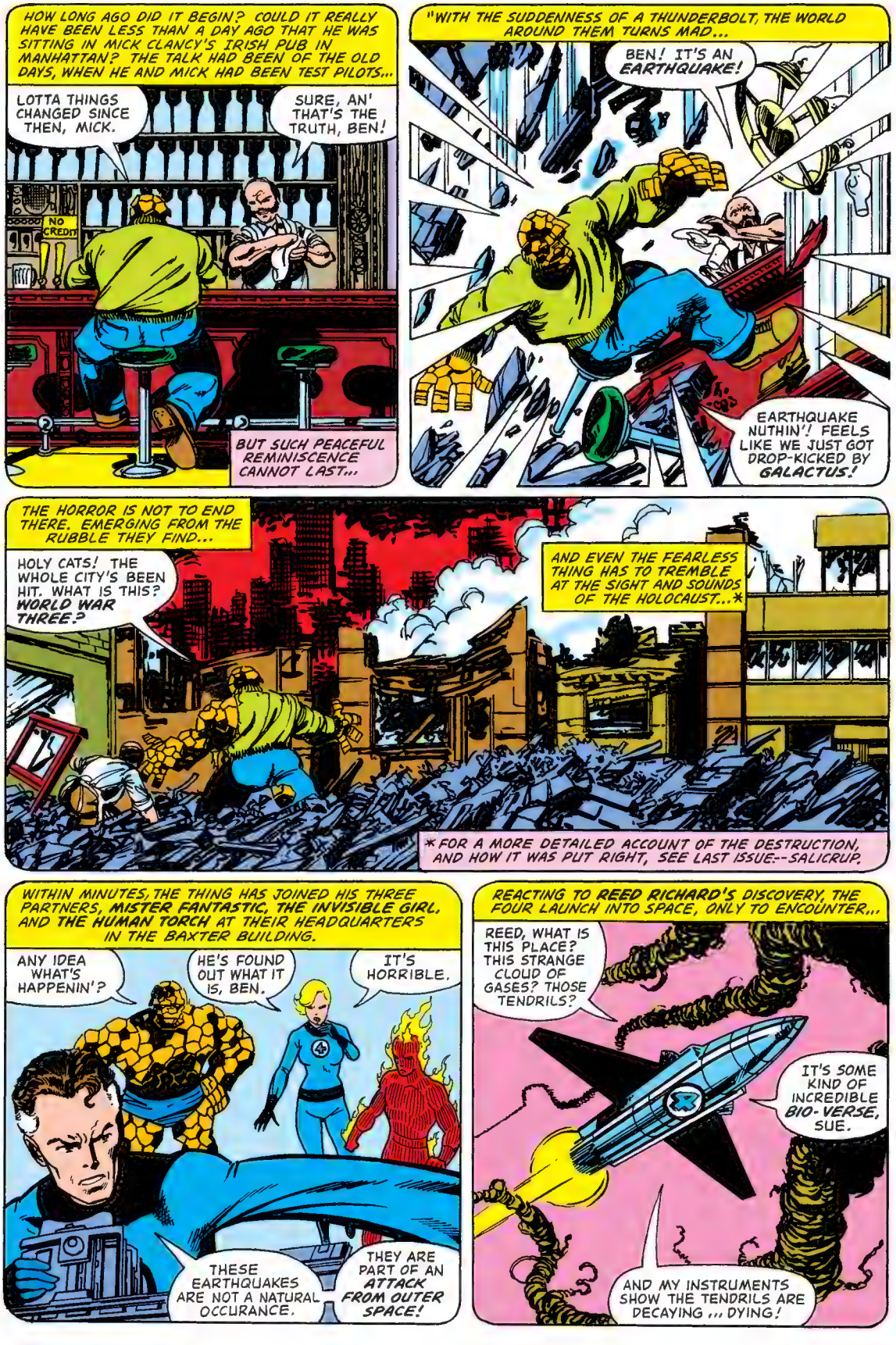
Stan Lee PRESENTS: THE FANTASTIC FOUR!®

FOUR AGAINST EGO!

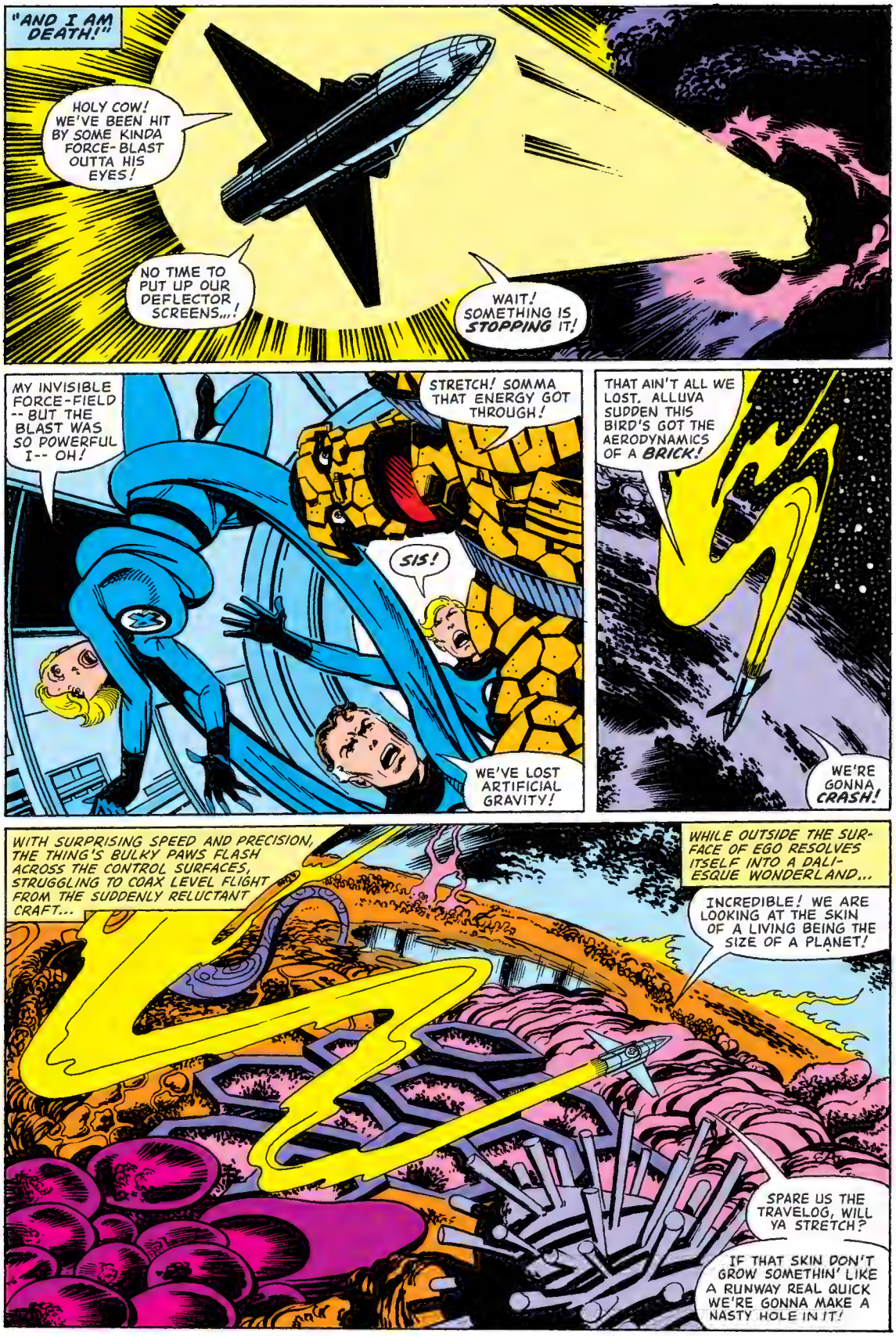


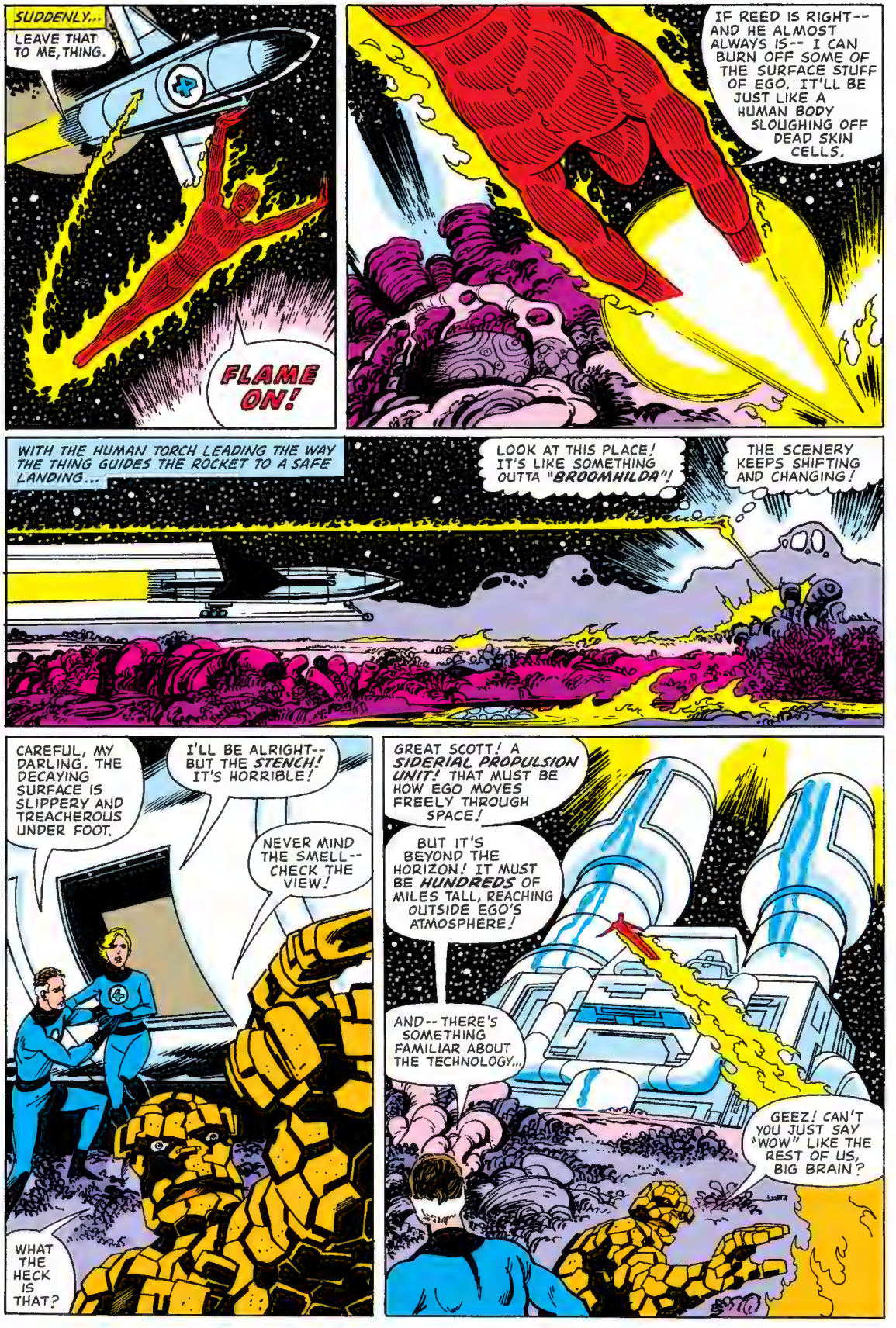
JOHN BYRNE	JEAN SIMEK	BOB SHAREN	JIM SALICRUP	JIM SHOOTER
WORDS AND PICTURES	LETTERS	COLORS	EDITOR	EDITOR-IN-CHIEF

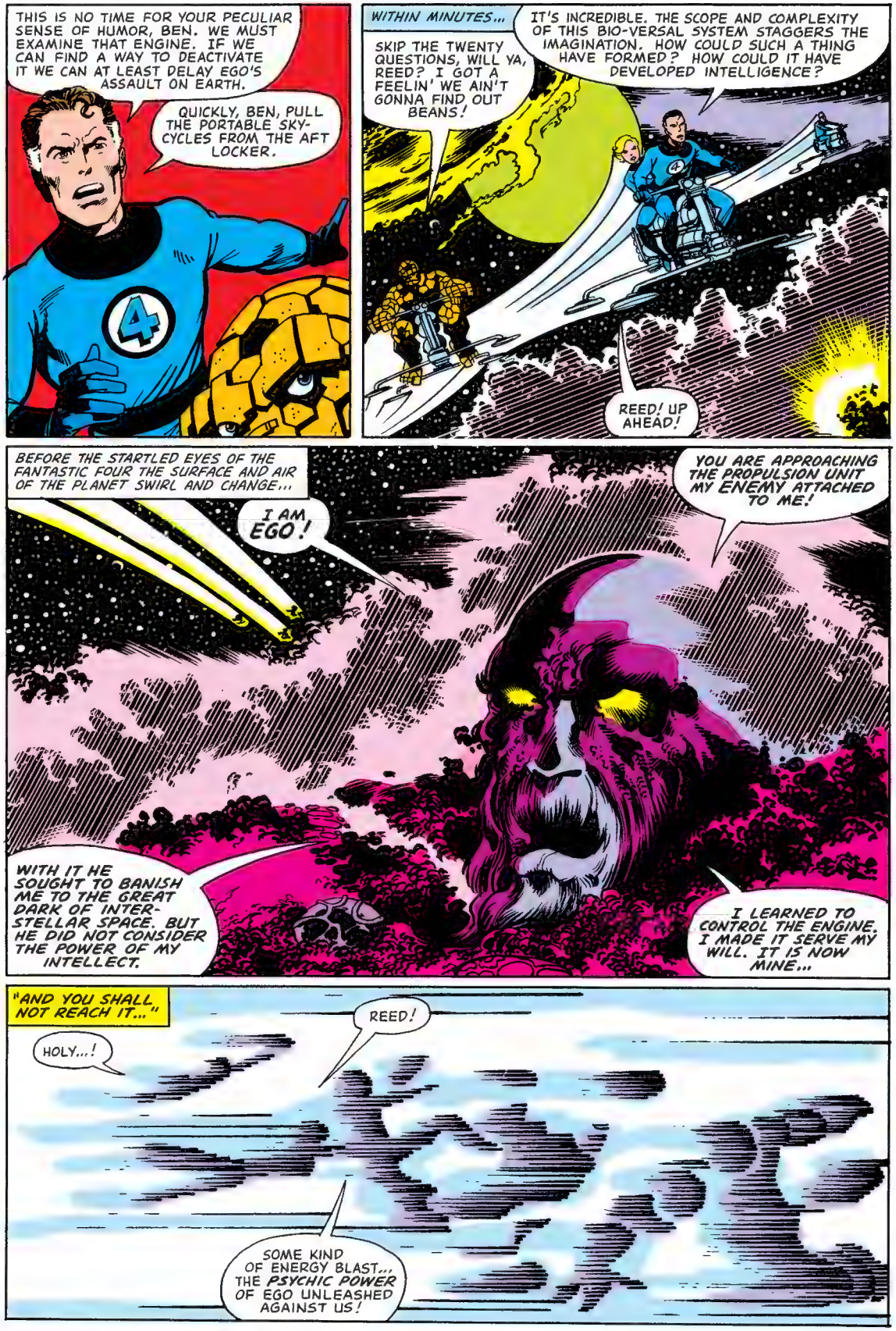

THE GENTLEMAN'S NAME IS BEN GRIMM, AND, AS THE THING HE IS ONE QUARTER OF THE FAR-FABLED FANTASTIC FOUR.
IN THE YEARS SINCE AN EXPOSURE TO COSMIC RAYS TRANSFORMED THE ERSTWHILE TEST PILOT INTO AN AMBULATORY PILE OF ORANGE ROCKS HE HAS BEEN TO THE FAR REACHES OF THE UNIVERSE.
HE HAS SEEN MANY A STRANGE SIGHT...
BUT NONE SO STRANGE AS THIS!
GOTTA KEEP MOVIN'. IF I STOP, EVEN FER A SECOND--
I MAY NEVER GET STARTED AGAIN!
THE COSMIC RAYS DID MORE THAN CHANGE BEN GRIMM'S OUTWARD APPEARANCE. THE THING HAS THE STRENGTH OF MANY MEN.
BUT HERE, IN THIS LUNATIC'S NIGHTMARE OF A PLACE, HE PLODS AS IF EACH STEP WERE AS MUCH AS HIS STRENGTH COULD MANAGE.
THIS GOOP UNDERFOOT DON'T HELP MATTERS MUCH. IT'S ALL GOOEY AND STICKY. IT'S LIKE TRYIN' TA WALK IN EARWAX!
AND IT'S SO BLASTED HOT. I ALMOST FER-GIT WHAT IT'S LIKE TA BE COOL. ANY-BODY'D THINK I WAS WALKIN' IN A FIREPLACE.
BUT WHO EVER HEARD OF A FIREPLACE IN THE EAR?
WATCH IT, BENJY BOY. THE HEAT AND PRESSURE ARE GETTIN' TO YA!
YER STARTIN' TA GO BANANNAS! I'VE GOTTA CONCENTRATE ON THE JOB AT HAND.
GOTTA HAUL THIS SUCKER ALL THE WAY DOWN, DOWN TA TH' CORE. IF I FAIL, I LET DOWN THE WHOLE FRIGGIN' EARTH!
AN' I'M THE ONLY ONE WHO CAN DO IT, NOW. THE OTHERS ARE GONE. THERE'S ONLY ME LEFT.
BUT IT'S SO HOT AN' THE PRESSURE! IF I DIDN'T HAVE ROCKS INSTEADA SKIN I'D BE PANCAKED FER SURE BY NOW.
S'NO GOOD. I GOTTA REST. JUST FER A MINUTE BEFORE I COLLAPSE.
AND, AS HE PAUSES, THE THING'S MIND, FLASHING WITHOUT ORDER ACROSS COUNTLESS JUMBLED THOUGHTS, TURNS BACK...

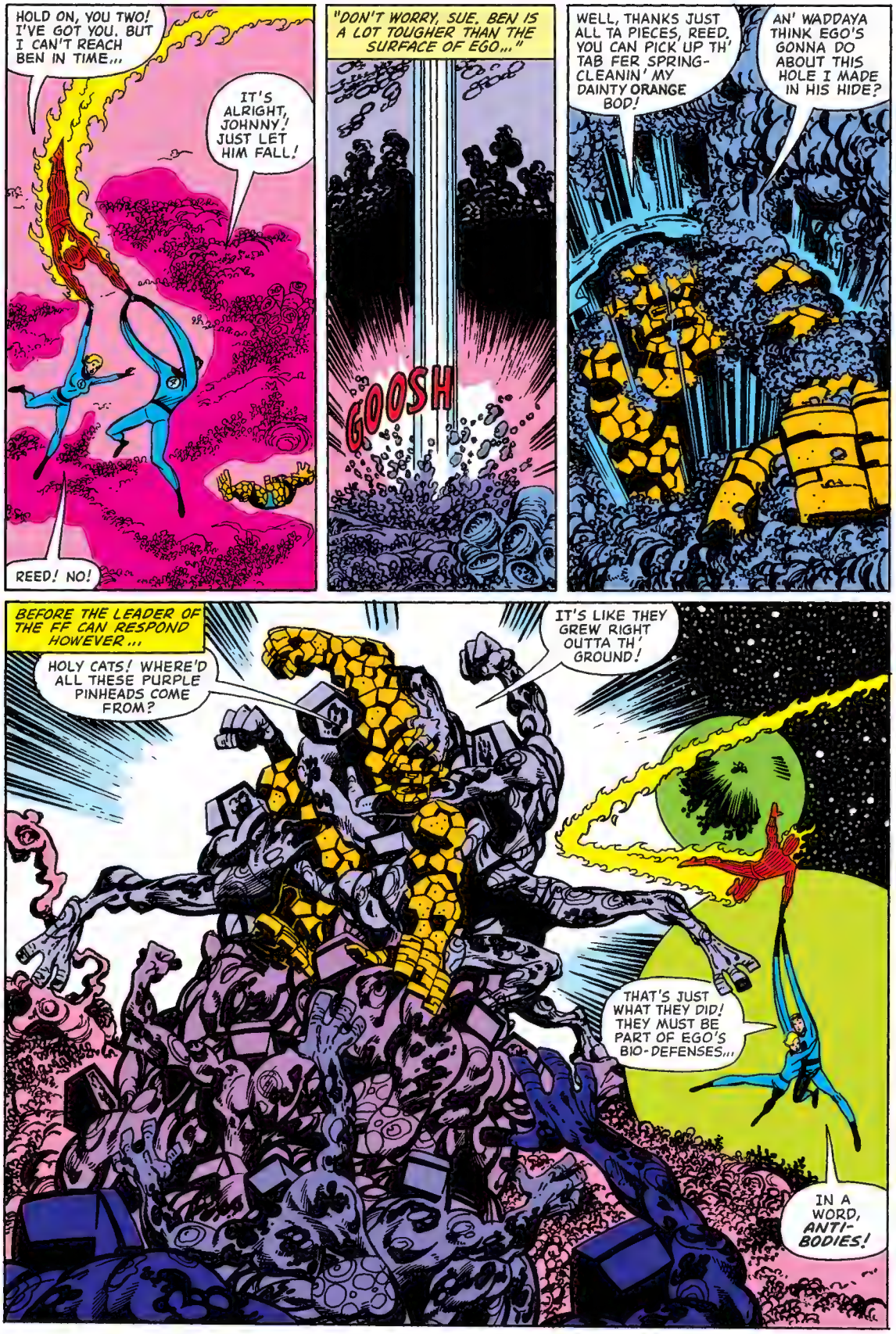

HOW LONG AGO DID IT BEGIN? COULD IT REALLY HAVE BEEN LESS THAN A DAY AGO THAT HE WAS SITTING IN MICK CLANCY'S IRISH PUB IN MANHATTAN? THE TALK HAD BEEN OF THE OLD DAYS, WHEN HE AND MICK HAD BEEN TEST PILOTS...
LOTTA THINGS CHANGED SINCE THEN, MICK.
SURE, AN' THAT'S THE TRUTH, BEN!
NO CREDIT
BUT SUCH PEACEFUL REMINISCENCE CANNOT LAST...
"WITH THE SUDDENNESS OF A THUNDERBOLT, THE WORLD AROUND THEM TURNS MAD...
BEN! IT'S AN EARTHQUAKE!
EARTHQUAKE NUTHIN'! FEELS LIKE WE JUST GOT DROP-KICKED BY GALACTUS!
THE HORROR IS NOT TO END THERE. EMERGING FROM THE RUBBLE THEY FIND...
HOLY CATS! THE WHOLE CITY'S BEEN HIT. WHAT IS THIS? WORLD WAR THREE?
AND EVEN THE FEARLESS THING HAS TO TREMBLE AT THE SIGHT AND SOUNDS OF THE HOLOCAUST...*
* FOR A MORE DETAILED ACCOUNT OF THE DESTRUCTION, AND HOW IT WAS PUT RIGHT, SEE LAST ISSUE:--SALICRUP.
WITHIN MINUTES, THE THING HAS JOINED HIS THREE PARTNERS, MISTER FANTASTIC, THE INVISIBLE GIRL, AND THE HUMAN TORCH AT THEIR HEADQUARTERS IN THE BAXTER BUILDING.
ANY IDEA WHAT'S HAPPENIN'?
HE'S FOUND OUT WHAT IT IS, BEN.
IT'S HORRIBLE.
THESE EARTHQUAKES ARE NOT A NATURAL OCCURANCE.
THEY ARE PART OF AN ATTACK FROM OUTER SPACE!
REACTING TO REED RICHARD'S DISCOVERY, THE FOUR LAUNCH INTO SPACE, ONLY TO ENCOUNTER...
REED, WHAT IS THIS PLACE? THIS STRANGE CLOUD OF GASES? THOSE TENDRILS?
IT'S SOME KIND OF INCREDIBLE BIO-VERSE, SUE.
AND MY INSTRUMENTS SHOW THE TENDRILS ARE DECAYING ... DYING!

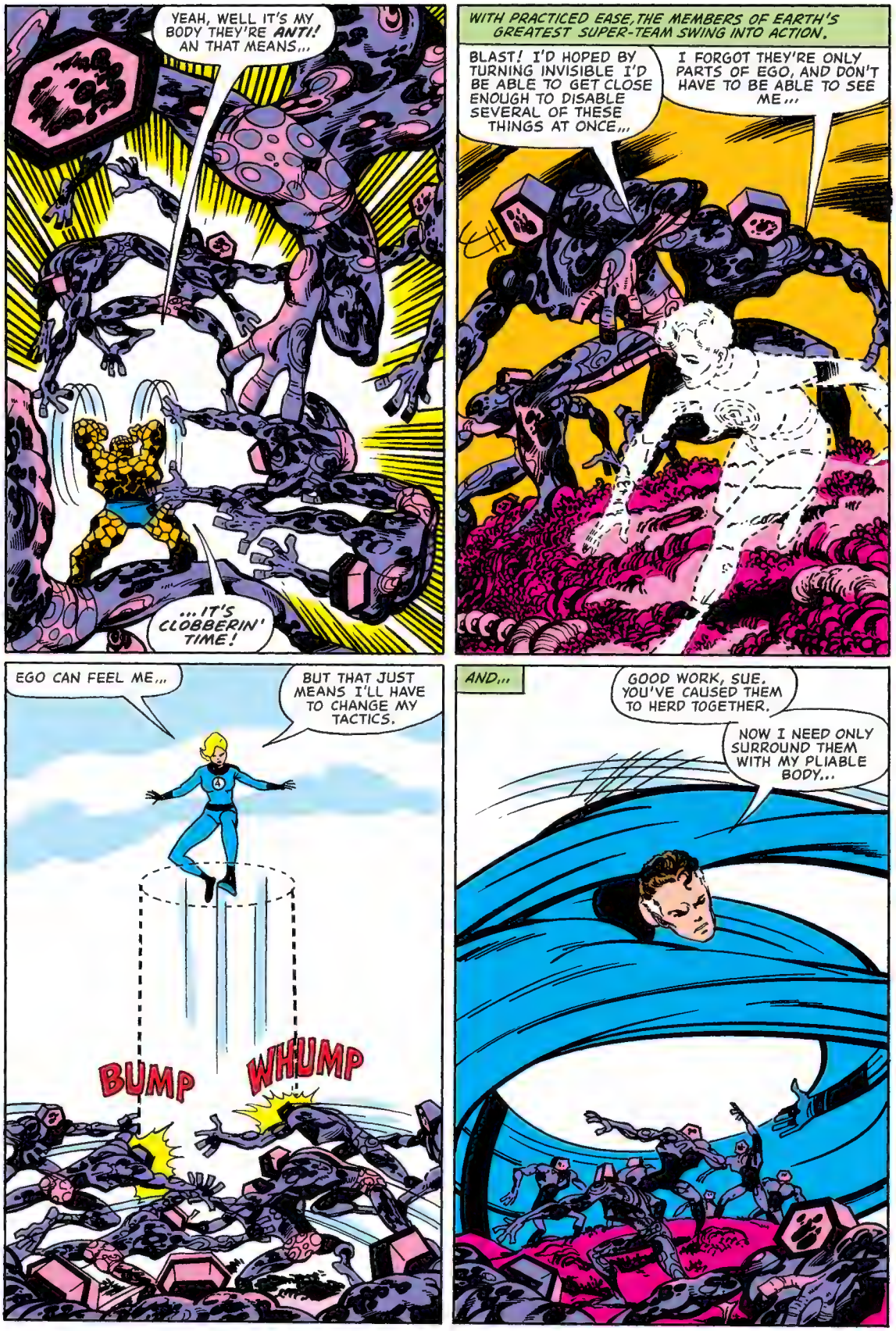
BUT NO INSTRUMENT READING COULD HAVE PREPARED THE INTREPID FOURSOME FOR THE NEXT SIGHT...
REED, WHAT IN HEAVEN'S NAME IS THAT?
IT LOOKS AS IF IT'S ALIVE. BUT IT CAN'T BE! IT JUST CAN'T!
SAY IT AIN'T SO, STRETCHO. SAY I AIN'T SEEIN' WHAT I'M SEEIN'!
BUT YOU ARE, BEN! YOU ARE!
THEN, A VOICE THAT RUMBLES ACROSS THE BIO-VERSE AS A GRINDING OF WORLDS...
CREATURES OF THE THIRD PLANET, HEED ME!
ACROSS THE BOUNDLESS REACHES OF THE COSMOS I HAVE SOUGHT HE WHO IS MY ENEMY!
HIS SPOOR IS THE REMNANTS OF DEAD CRUSHED WORLDS, AND IT HAS LED ME TO THIS STELLAR SYSTEM.
NOW I MEAN TO DESTROY YOUR WORLD AND ALL ITS TEEMING POPULACE!
I AM THE LIVING PLANET.
I AM EGO!

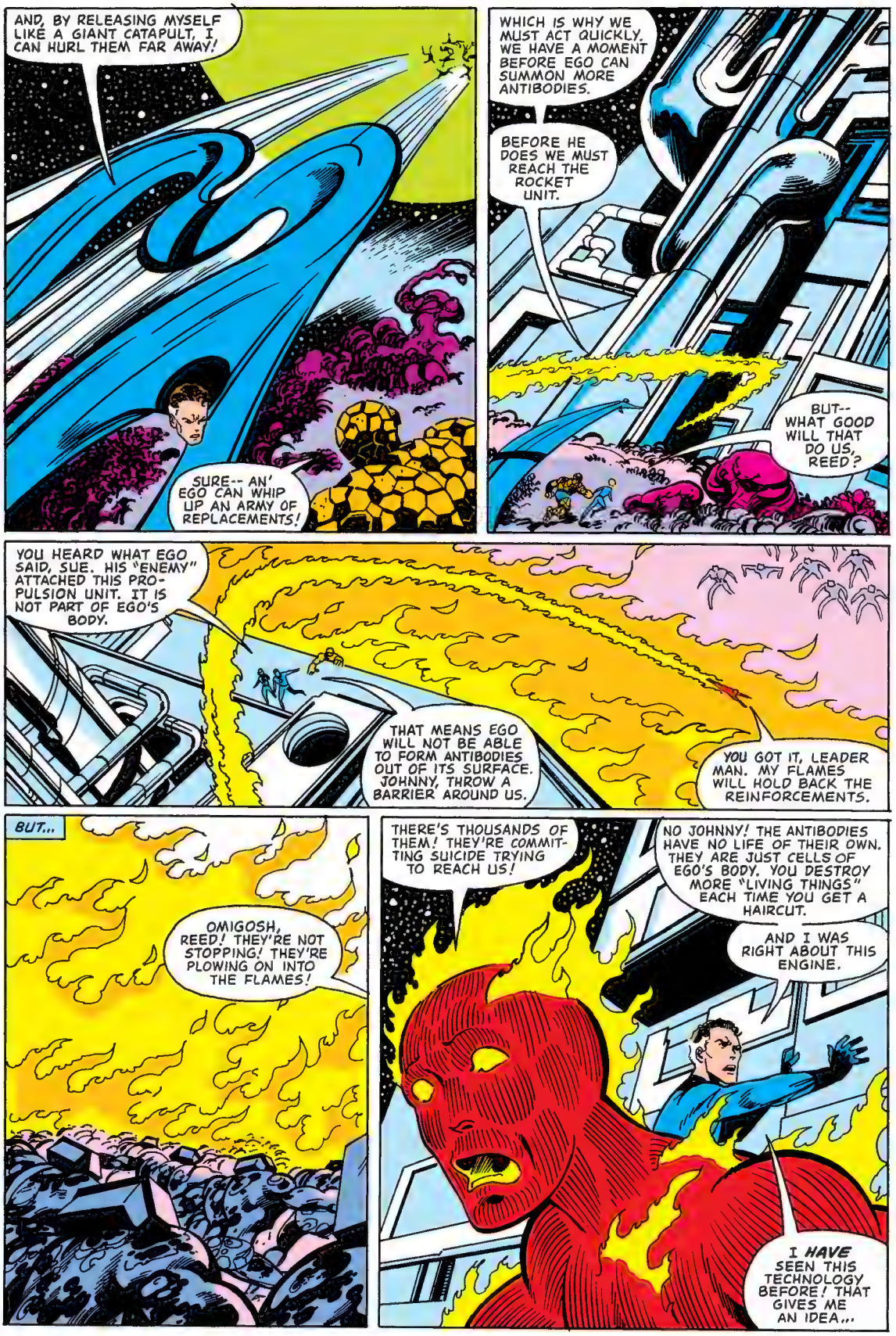

"AND I AM DEATH!"
HOLY COW! WE'VE BEEN HIT BY SOME KINDA FORCE-BLAST OUTTA HIS EYES!
NO TIME TO PUT UP OUR DEFLECTOR SCREENS...!
WAIT! SOMETHING IS STOPPING IT!
MY INVISIBLE FORCE-FIELD -- BUT THE BLAST WAS SO POWERFUL I-- OH!
STRETCH! SOMMA THAT ENERGY GOT THROUGH!
SIS!
WE'VE LOST ARTIFICIAL GRAVITY!
THAT AIN'T ALL WE LOST. ALLUVA SUDDEN THIS BIRD'S GOT THE AERODYNAMICS OF A BRICK!
WE'RE GONNA CRASH!
WITH SURPRISING SPEED AND PRECISION, THE THING'S BULKY PAWS FLASH ACROSS THE CONTROL SURFACES, STRUGGLING TO COAX LEVEL FLIGHT FROM THE SUDDENLY RELUCTANT CRAFT...
WHILE OUTSIDE THE SURFACE OF EGO RESOLVES ITSELF INTO A DALI-ESQUE WONDERLAND...
INCREDIBLE! WE ARE LOOKING AT THE SKIN OF A LIVING BEING THE SIZE OF A PLANET!
SPARE US THE TRAVELOG, WILL YA STRETCH?
IF THAT SKIN DON'T GROW SOMETHIN' LIKE A RUNWAY REAL QUICK WE'RE GONNA MAKE A NASTY HOLE IN IT!

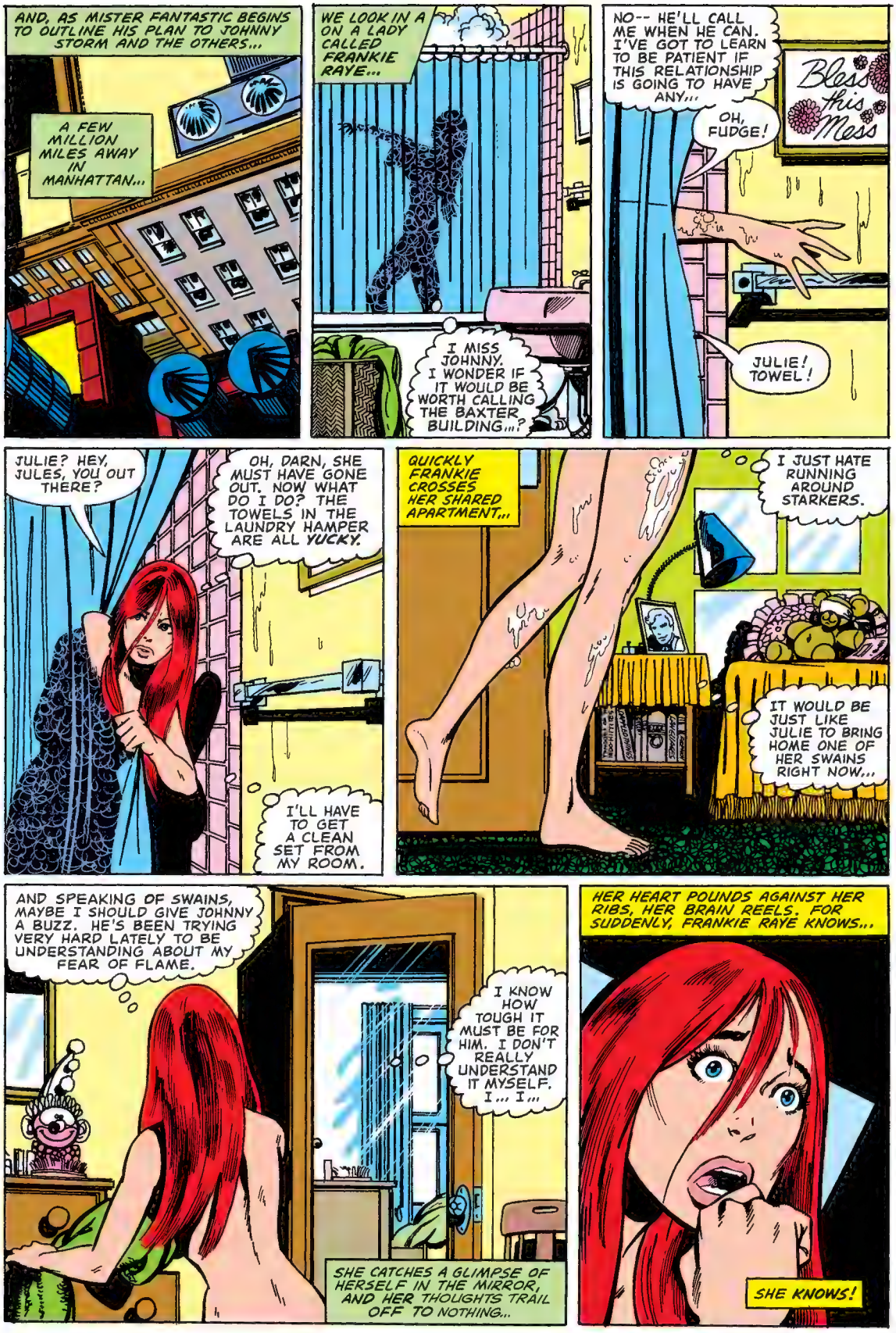

SUDDENLY...
LEAVE THAT TO ME, THING.
FLAME ON!
IF REED IS RIGHT-- AND HE ALMOST ALWAYS IS-- I CAN BURN OFF SOME OF THE SURFACE STUFF OF EGO. IT'LL BE JUST LIKE A HUMAN BODY SLOUGHING OFF DEAD SKIN CELLS.
WITH THE HUMAN TORCH LEADING THE WAY THE THING GUIDES THE ROCKET TO A SAFE LANDING...
LOOK AT THIS PLACE! IT'S LIKE SOMETHING OUTTA "BROOMHILDA"!
THE SCENERY KEEPS SHIFTING AND CHANGING!
CAREFUL, MY DARLING. THE DECAYING SURFACE IS SLIPPERY AND TREACHEROUS UNDER FOOT.
I'LL BE ALRIGHT-- BUT THE STENCH! IT'S HORRIBLE!
NEVER MIND THE SMELL-- CHECK THE VIEW!
WHAT THE HECK IS THAT?
GREAT SCOTT! A SIDERIAL PROPULSION UNIT! THAT MUST BE HOW EGO MOVES FREELY THROUGH SPACE!
BUT IT'S BEYOND THE HORIZON! IT MUST BE HUNDREDS OF MILES TALL, REACHING OUTSIDE EGO'S ATMOSPHERE!
AND-- THERE'S SOMETHING FAMILIAR ABOUT THE TECHNOLOGY...
GEEZ! CAN'T YOU JUST SAY "WOW" LIKE THE REST OF US, BIG BRAIN?

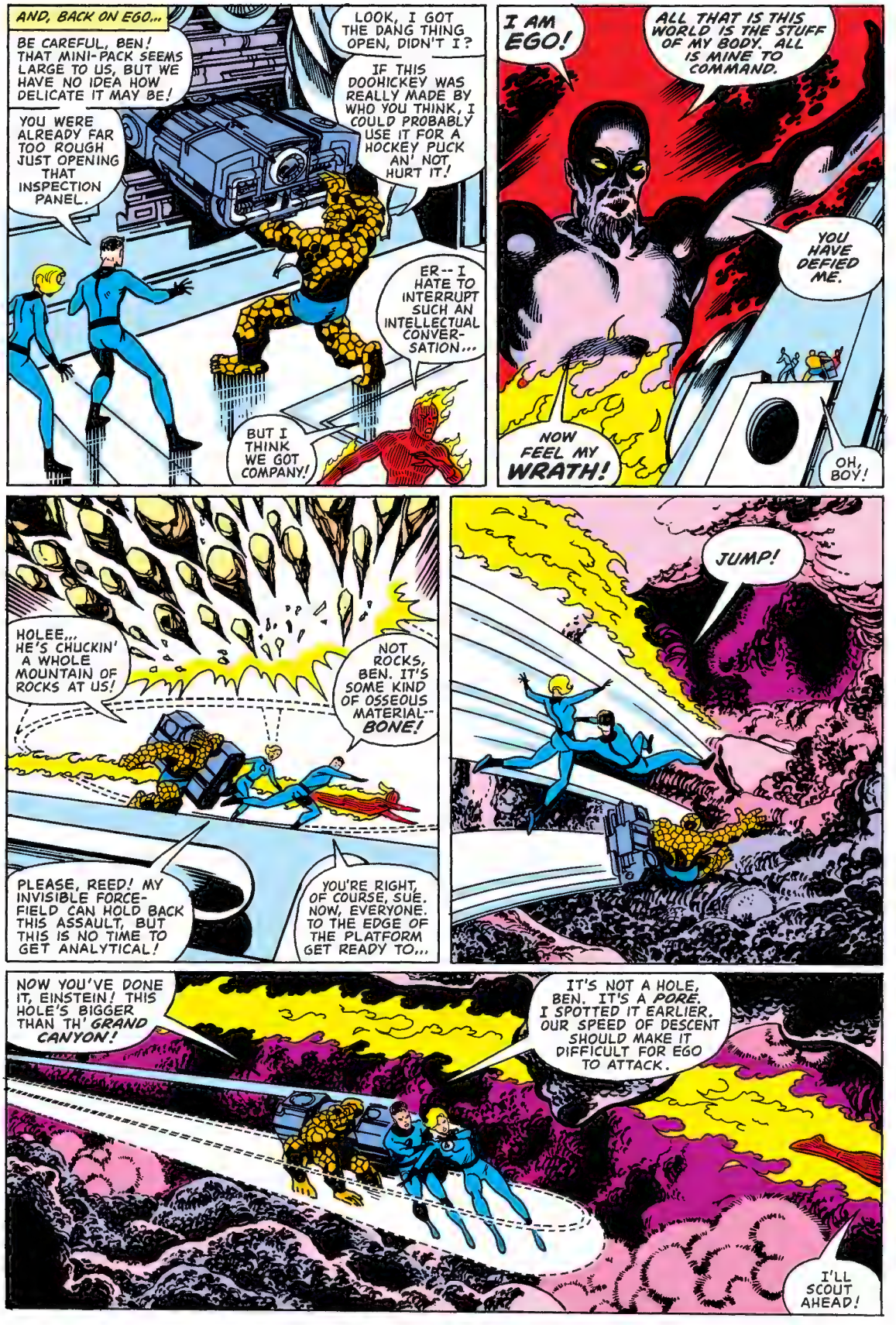

THIS IS NO TIME FOR YOUR PECULIAR SENSE OF HUMOR, BEN. WE MUST EXAMINE THAT ENGINE. IF WE CAN FIND A WAY TO DEACTIVATE IT WE CAN AT LEAST DELAY EGO'S ASSAULT ON EARTH.
QUICKLY, BEN, PULL THE PORTABLE SKY-CYCLES FROM THE AFT LOCKER.
WITHIN MINUTES...
SKIP THE TWENTY QUESTIONS, WILL YA, REED? I GOT A FEELIN' WE AIN'T GONNA FIND OUT BEANS!
IT'S INCREDIBLE. THE SCOPE AND COMPLEXITY OF THIS BIO-VERSAL SYSTEM STAGGERS THE IMAGINATION. HOW COULD SUCH A THING HAVE FORMED? HOW COULD IT HAVE DEVELOPED INTELLIGENCE?
REED! UP AHEAD!
BEFORE THE STARTLED EYES OF THE FANTASTIC FOUR THE SURFACE AND AIR OF THE PLANET SWIRL AND CHANGE...
I AM EGO!
YOU ARE APPROACHING THE PROPULSION UNIT MY ENEMY ATTACHED TO ME!
WITH IT HE SOUGHT TO BANISH ME TO THE GREAT DARK OF INTER-STELLAR SPACE. BUT HE DID NOT CONSIDER THE POWER OF MY INTELLECT.
I LEARNED TO CONTROL THE ENGINE. I MADE IT SERVE MY WILL. IT IS NOW MINE...
"AND YOU SHALL NOT REACH IT..."
REED!
HOLY...!
SOME KIND OF ENERGY BLAST... THE PSYCHIC POWER OF EGO UNLEASHED AGAINST US!

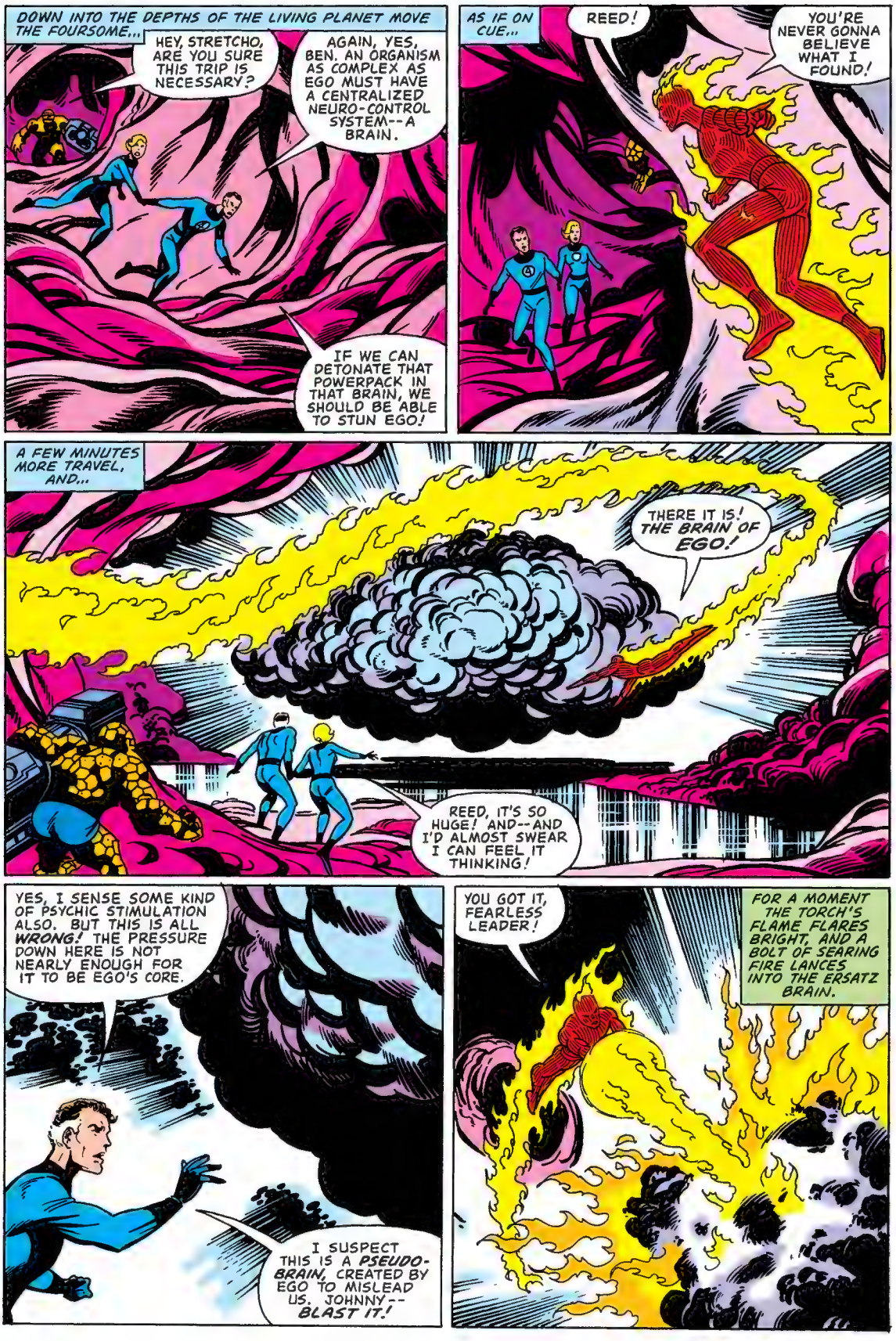

HOLD ON, YOU TWO! I'VE GOT YOU, BUT I CAN'T REACH BEN IN TIME...
IT'S ALRIGHT, JOHNNY! JUST LET HIM FALL!
REED! NO!
"DON'T WORRY, SUE. BEN IS A LOT TOUGHER THAN THE SURFACE OF EGO..."
GOOSH
WELL, THANKS JUST ALL TA PIECES, REED. YOU CAN PICK UP TH' TAB FER SPRING-CLEANIN' MY DAINTY ORANGE BOD!
AN' WADDAYA THINK EGO'S GONNA DO ABOUT THIS HOLE I MADE IN HIS HIDE?
BEFORE THE LEADER OF THE FF CAN RESPOND HOWEVER...
HOLY CATS! WHERE'D ALL THESE PURPLE PINHEADS COME FROM?
IT'S LIKE THEY GREW RIGHT OUTTA TH' GROUND!
THAT'S JUST WHAT THEY DID! THEY MUST BE PART OF EGO'S BIO-DEFENSES...
IN A WORD, ANTI-BODIES!

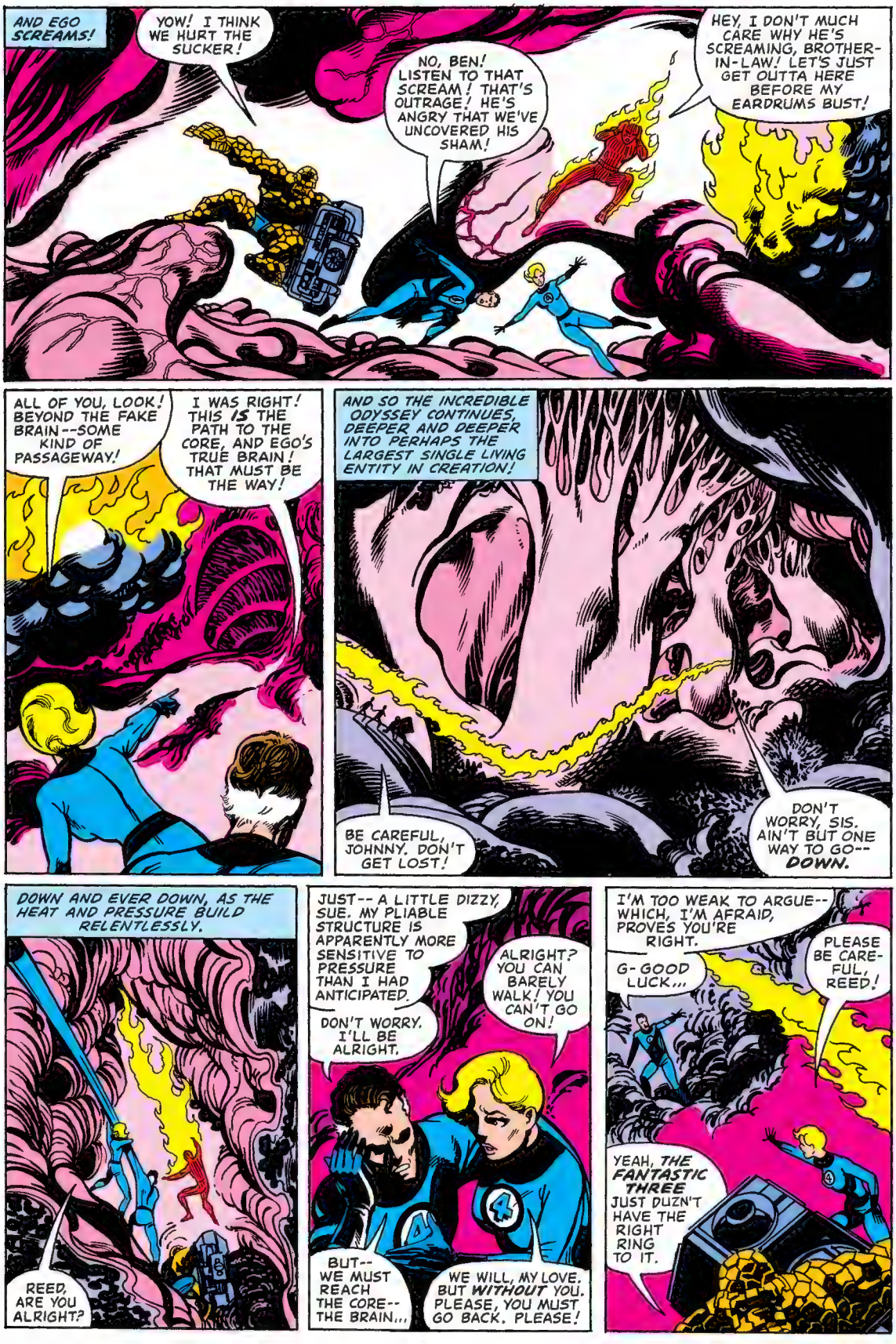

YEAH, WELL IT'S MY BODY THEY'RE ANTI! AN THAT MEANS...
...IT'S CLOBBERIN' TIME!
WITH PRACTICED EASE, THE MEMBERS OF EARTH'S GREATEST SUPER-TEAM SWING INTO ACTION.
BLAST! I'D HOPED BY TURNING INVISIBLE I'D BE ABLE TO GET CLOSE ENOUGH TO DISABLE SEVERAL OF THESE THINGS AT ONCE...
I FORGOT THEY'RE ONLY PARTS OF EGO, AND DON'T HAVE TO BE ABLE TO SEE ME...
EGO CAN FEEL ME...
BUT THAT JUST MEANS I'LL HAVE TO CHANGE MY TACTICS.
BUMP
WHUMP
AND...
GOOD WORK, SUE. YOU'VE CAUSED THEM TO HERD TOGETHER.
NOW I NEED ONLY SURROUND THEM WITH MY PLIABLE BODY...

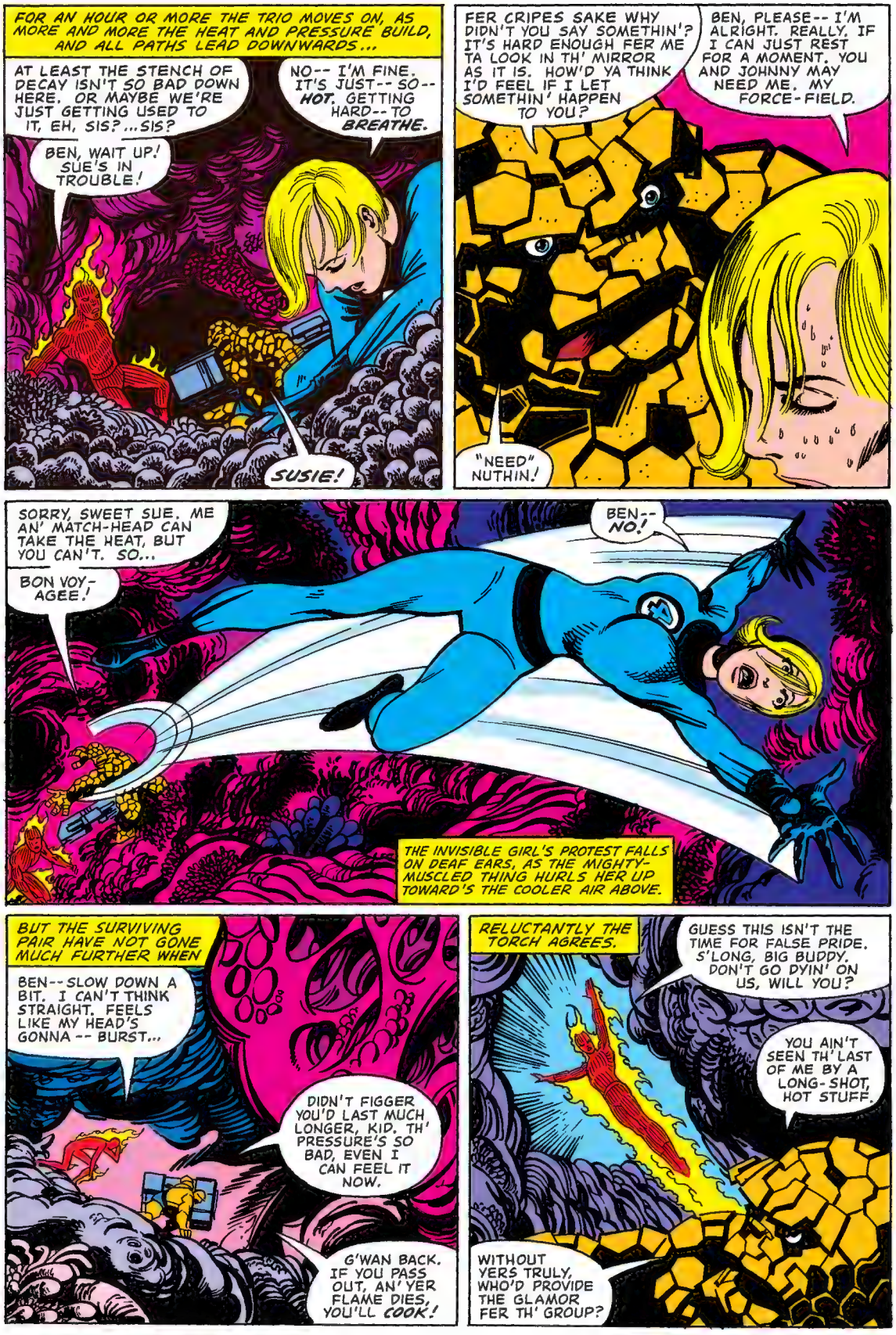

AND, BY RELEASING MYSELF LIKE A GIANT CATAPULT, I CAN HURL THEM FAR AWAY!
SURE-- AN' EGO CAN WHIP UP AN ARMY OF REPLACEMENTS!
WHICH IS WHY WE MUST ACT QUICKLY. WE HAVE A MOMENT BEFORE EGO CAN SUMMON MORE ANTIBODIES.
BEFORE HE DOES WE MUST REACH THE ROCKET UNIT.
BUT-- WHAT GOOD WILL THAT DO US, REED?
YOU HEARD WHAT EGO SAID, SUE. HIS "ENEMY" ATTACHED THIS PROPULSION UNIT. IT IS NOT PART OF EGO'S BODY.
THAT MEANS EGO WILL NOT BE ABLE TO FORM ANTIBODIES OUT OF ITS SURFACE. JOHNNY, THROW A BARRIER AROUND US.
YOU GOT IT, LEADER MAN. MY FLAMES WILL HOLD BACK THE REINFORCEMENTS.
BUT...
OMIGOSH, REED! THEY'RE NOT STOPPING! THEY'RE PLOWING ON INTO THE FLAMES!
THERE'S THOUSANDS OF THEM! THEY'RE COMMITTING SUICIDE TRYING TO REACH US!
NO JOHNNY! THE ANTIBODIES HAVE NO LIFE OF THEIR OWN. THEY ARE JUST CELLS OF EGO'S BODY. YOU DESTROY MORE "LIVING THINGS" EACH TIME YOU GET A HAIRCUT.
AND I WAS RIGHT ABOUT THIS ENGINE.
I *HAVE* SEEN THIS TECHNOLOGY BEFORE! THAT GIVES ME AN IDEA...

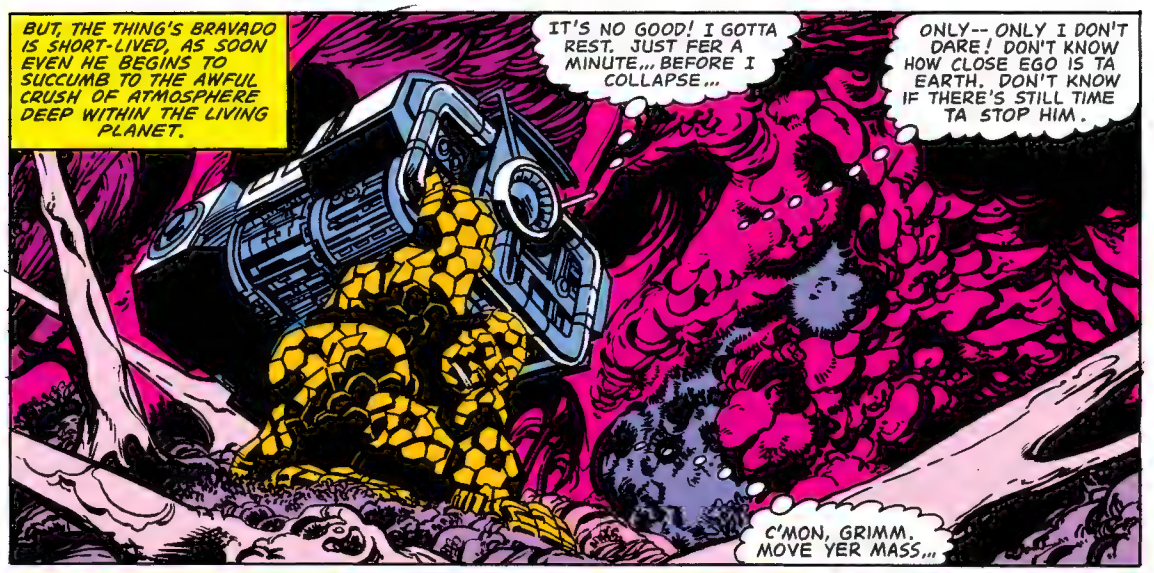

AND, AS MISTER FANTASTIC BEGINS TO OUTLINE HIS PLAN TO JOHNNY STORM AND THE OTHERS...
A FEW MILLION MILES AWAY IN MANHATTAN...
WE LOOK IN A ON A LADY CALLED FRANKIE RAYE...
I MISS JOHNNY. I WONDER IF IT WOULD BE WORTH CALLING THE BAXTER BUILDING...?
NO-- HE'LL CALL ME WHEN HE CAN. I'VE GOT TO LEARN TO BE PATIENT IF THIS RELATIONSHIP IS GOING TO HAVE ANY...
OH, FUDGE!
Bless this Mess
JULIE! TOWEL!
JULIE? HEY, JULES, YOU OUT THERE?
OH, DARN, SHE MUST HAVE GONE OUT. NOW WHAT DO I DO? THE TOWELS IN THE LAUNDRY HAMPER ARE ALL YUCKY.
I'LL HAVE TO GET A CLEAN SET FROM MY ROOM.
QUICKLY FRANKIE CROSSES HER SHARED APARTMENT...
I JUST HATE RUNNING AROUND STARKERS.
IT WOULD BE JUST LIKE JULIE TO BRING HOME ONE OF HER SWAINS RIGHT NOW...
AND SPEAKING OF SWAINS, MAYBE I SHOULD GIVE JOHNNY A BUZZ. HE'S BEEN TRYING VERY HARD LATELY TO BE UNDERSTANDING ABOUT MY FEAR OF FLAME.
I KNOW HOW TOUGH IT MUST BE FOR HIM. I DON'T REALLY UNDERSTAND IT MYSELF. I... I...
SHE CATCHES A GLIMPSE OF HERSELF IN THE MIRROR, AND HER THOUGHTS TRAIL OFF TO NOTHING...
HER HEART POUNDS AGAINST HER RIBS, HER BRAIN REELS. FOR SUDDENLY, FRANKIE RAYE KNOWS...
SHE KNOWS!


AND, BACK ON EGO...
BE CAREFUL, BEN! THAT MINI-PACK SEEMS LARGE TO US, BUT WE HAVE NO IDEA HOW DELICATE IT MAY BE!
YOU WERE ALREADY FAR TOO ROUGH JUST OPENING THAT INSPECTION PANEL.
LOOK, I GOT THE DANG THING OPEN, DIDN'T I?
IF THIS DOOHICKEY WAS REALLY MADE BY WHO YOU THINK, I COULD PROBABLY USE IT FOR A HOCKEY PUCK AN' NOT HURT IT!
ER-- I HATE TO INTERRUPT SUCH AN INTELLECTUAL CONVER-SATION...
BUT I THINK WE GOT COMPANY!
I AM EGO!
ALL THAT IS THIS WORLD IS THE STUFF OF MY BODY. ALL IS MINE TO COMMAND.
YOU HAVE DEFIED ME.
NOW FEEL MY WRATH!
OH, BOY!
HOLEE... HE'S CHUCKIN' A WHOLE MOUNTAIN OF ROCKS AT US!
NOT ROCKS, BEN. IT'S SOME KIND OF OSSEOUS MATERIAL-- BONE!
PLEASE, REED! MY INVISIBLE FORCE-FIELD CAN HOLD BACK THIS ASSAULT, BUT THIS IS NO TIME TO GET ANALYTICAL!
YOU'RE RIGHT, OF COURSE, SUE. NOW, EVERYONE. TO THE EDGE OF THE PLATFORM GET READY TO...
JUMP!
NOW YOU'VE DONE IT, EINSTEIN! THIS HOLE'S BIGGER THAN TH' GRAND CANYON!
IT'S NOT A HOLE, BEN. IT'S A PORE. I SPOTTED IT EARLIER. OUR SPEED OF DESCENT SHOULD MAKE IT DIFFICULT FOR EGO TO ATTACK.
I'LL SCOUT AHEAD!

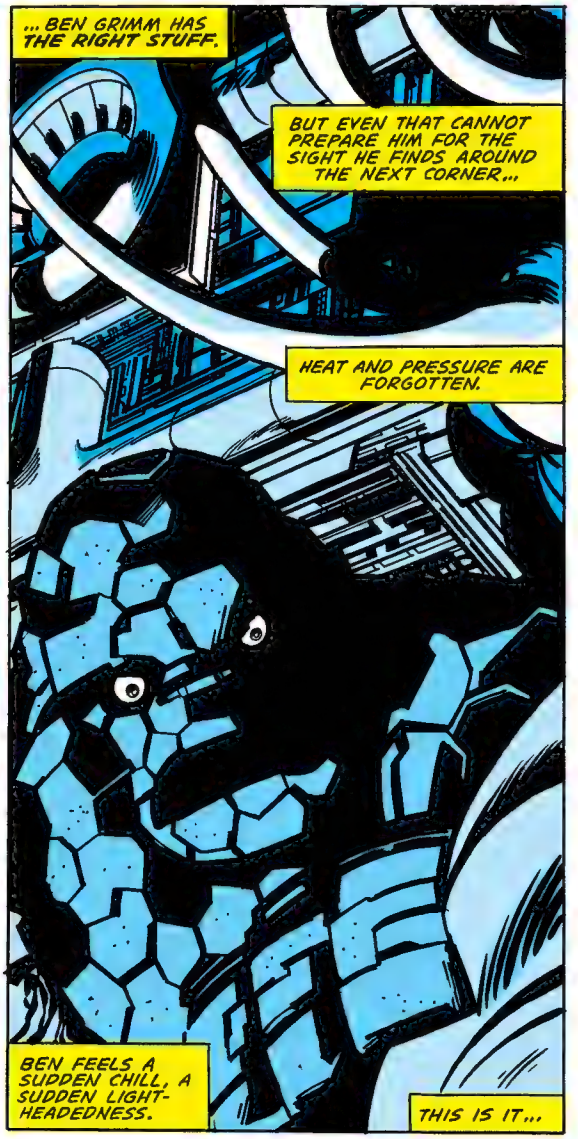

DOWN INTO THE DEPTHS OF THE LIVING PLANET MOVE THE FOURSOME...
HEY, STRETCHO, ARE YOU SURE THIS TRIP IS NECESSARY?
AGAIN, YES, BEN. AN ORGANISM AS COMPLEX AS EGO MUST HAVE A CENTRALIZED NEURO-CONTROL SYSTEM--A BRAIN.
IF WE CAN DETONATE THAT POWERPACK IN THAT BRAIN, WE SHOULD BE ABLE TO STUN EGO!
AS IF ON CUE...
REED!
YOU'RE NEVER GONNA BELIEVE WHAT I FOUND!
A FEW MINUTES MORE TRAVEL, AND...
THERE IT IS! THE BRAIN OF EGO!
REED, IT'S SO HUGE! AND--AND I'D ALMOST SWEAR I CAN FEEL IT THINKING!
YES, I SENSE SOME KIND OF PSYCHIC STIMULATION ALSO. BUT THIS IS ALL WRONG! THE PRESSURE DOWN HERE IS NOT NEARLY ENOUGH FOR IT TO BE EGO'S CORE.
I SUSPECT THIS IS A PSEUDO-BRAIN, CREATED BY EGO TO MISLEAD US. JOHNNY--BLAST IT!
YOU GOT IT, FEARLESS LEADER!
FOR A MOMENT THE TORCH'S FLAME FLARES BRIGHT, AND A BOLT OF SEARING FIRE LANCES INTO THE ERSATZ BRAIN.

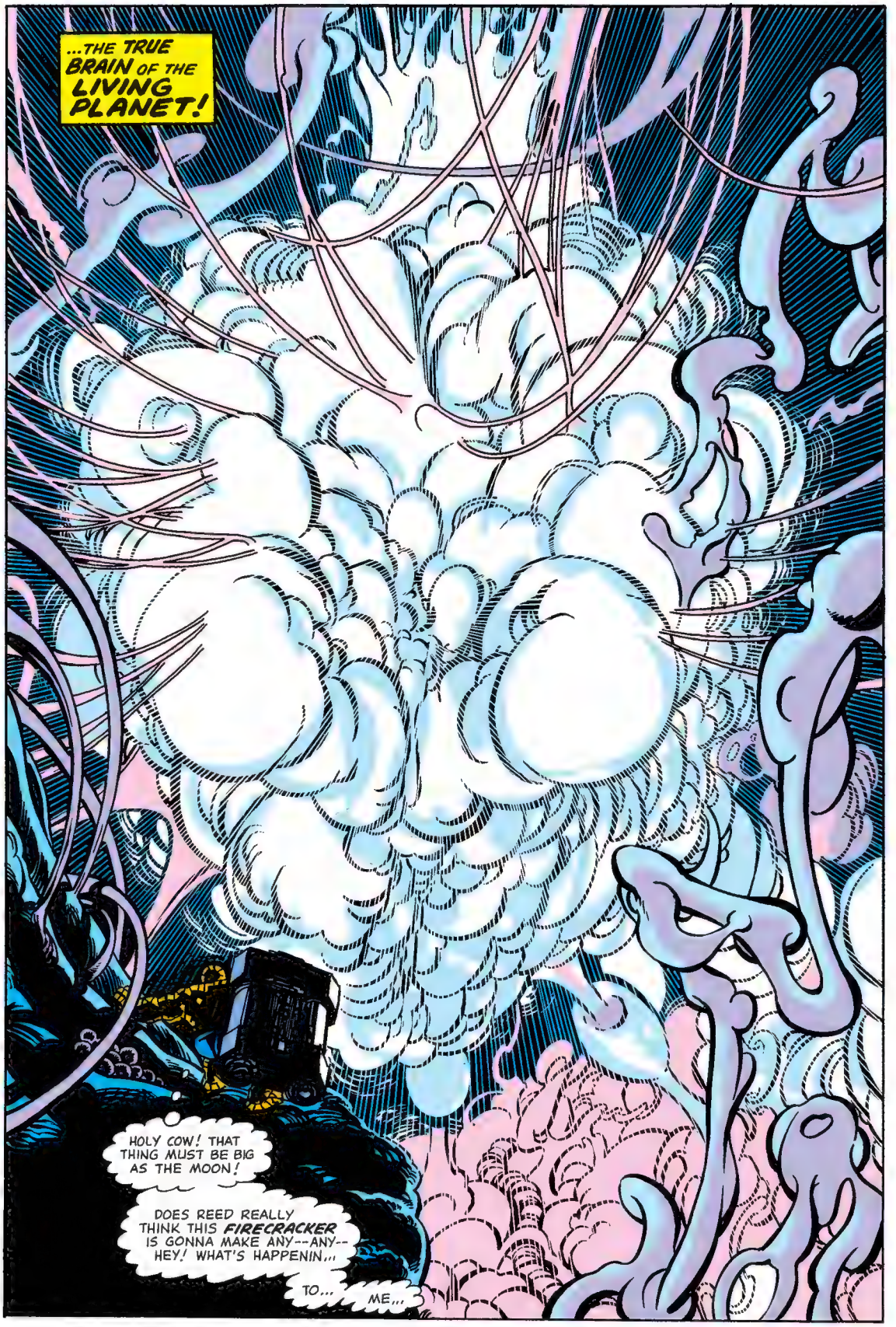

AND EGO SCREAMS!
YOW! I THINK WE HURT THE SUCKER!
NO, BEN! LISTEN TO THAT SCREAM! THAT'S OUTRAGE! HE'S ANGRY THAT WE'VE UNCOVERED HIS SHAM!
HEY, I DON'T MUCH CARE WHY HE'S SCREAMING, BROTHER-IN-LAW! LET'S JUST GET OUTTA HERE BEFORE MY EARDRUMS BUST!
ALL OF YOU, LOOK! BEYOND THE FAKE BRAIN--SOME KIND OF PASSAGEWAY!
I WAS RIGHT! THIS IS THE PATH TO THE CORE, AND EGO'S TRUE BRAIN! THAT MUST BE THE WAY!
AND SO THE INCREDIBLE ODYSSEY CONTINUES, DEEPER AND DEEPER INTO PERHAPS THE LARGEST SINGLE LIVING ENTITY IN CREATION!
BE CAREFUL, JOHNNY. DON'T GET LOST!
DON'T WORRY, SIS. AIN'T BUT ONE WAY TO GO-- DOWN.
DOWN AND EVER DOWN, AS THE HEAT AND PRESSURE BUILD RELENTLESSLY.
REED, ARE YOU ALRIGHT?
JUST-- A LITTLE DIZZY, SUE. MY PLIABLE STRUCTURE IS APPARENTLY MORE SENSITIVE TO PRESSURE THAN I HAD ANTICIPATED.
DON'T WORRY. I'LL BE ALRIGHT.
ALRIGHT? YOU CAN BARELY WALK! YOU CAN'T GO ON!
BUT-- WE MUST REACH THE CORE-- THE BRAIN...
WE WILL, MY LOVE. BUT WITHOUT YOU. PLEASE, YOU MUST GO BACK. PLEASE!
I'M TOO WEAK TO ARGUE-- WHICH, I'M AFRAID, PROVES YOU'RE RIGHT.
G-GOOD LUCK...
PLEASE BE CAREFUL, REED!
YEAH, THE FANTASTIC THREE JUST DUZN'T HAVE THE RIGHT RING TO IT.


FOR AN HOUR OR MORE THE TRIO MOVES ON, AS MORE AND MORE THE HEAT AND PRESSURE BUILD, AND ALL PATHS LEAD DOWNWARDS...
AT LEAST THE STENCH OF DECAY ISN'T SO BAD DOWN HERE. OR MAYBE WE'RE JUST GETTING USED TO IT, EH, SIS? ...SIS?
NO-- I'M FINE. IT'S JUST-- SO-- HOT. GETTING HARD-- TO BREATHE.
BEN, WAIT UP! SUE'S IN TROUBLE!
SUSIE!
FER CRIPES SAKE WHY DIDN'T YOU SAY SOMETHIN'? IT'S HARD ENOUGH FER ME TA LOOK IN TH' MIRROR AS IT IS. HOW'D YA THINK I'D FEEL IF I LET SOMETHIN' HAPPEN TO YOU?
BEN, PLEASE-- I'M ALRIGHT. REALLY. IF I CAN JUST REST FOR A MOMENT. YOU AND JOHNNY MAY NEED ME. MY FORCE-FIELD.
"NEED" NUTHIN!
SORRY, SWEET SUE. ME AN' MATCH-HEAD CAN TAKE THE HEAT, BUT YOU CAN'T. SO...
BON VOY-AGEE!
BEN-- NO!
THE INVISIBLE GIRL'S PROTEST FALLS ON DEAF EARS, AS THE MIGHTY-MUSCLED THING HURLS HER UP TOWARD'S THE COOLER AIR ABOVE.
BUT THE SURVIVING PAIR HAVE NOT GONE MUCH FURTHER WHEN
BEN-- SLOW DOWN A BIT. I CAN'T THINK STRAIGHT. FEELS LIKE MY HEAD'S GONNA -- BURST...
DIDN'T FIGGER YOU'D LAST MUCH LONGER, KID. TH' PRESSURE'S SO BAD, EVEN I CAN FEEL IT NOW.
G'WAN BACK. IF YOU PASS OUT, AN' YER FLAME DIES, YOU'LL COOK!
RELUCTANTLY THE TORCH AGREES.
GUESS THIS ISN'T THE TIME FOR FALSE PRIDE. S'LONG, BIG BUDDY. DON'T GO DYIN' ON US, WILL YOU?
YOU AIN'T SEEN TH' LAST OF ME BY A LONG-SHOT, HOT STUFF.
WITHOUT YERS TRULY, WHO'D PROVIDE THE GLAMOR FER TH' GROUP?

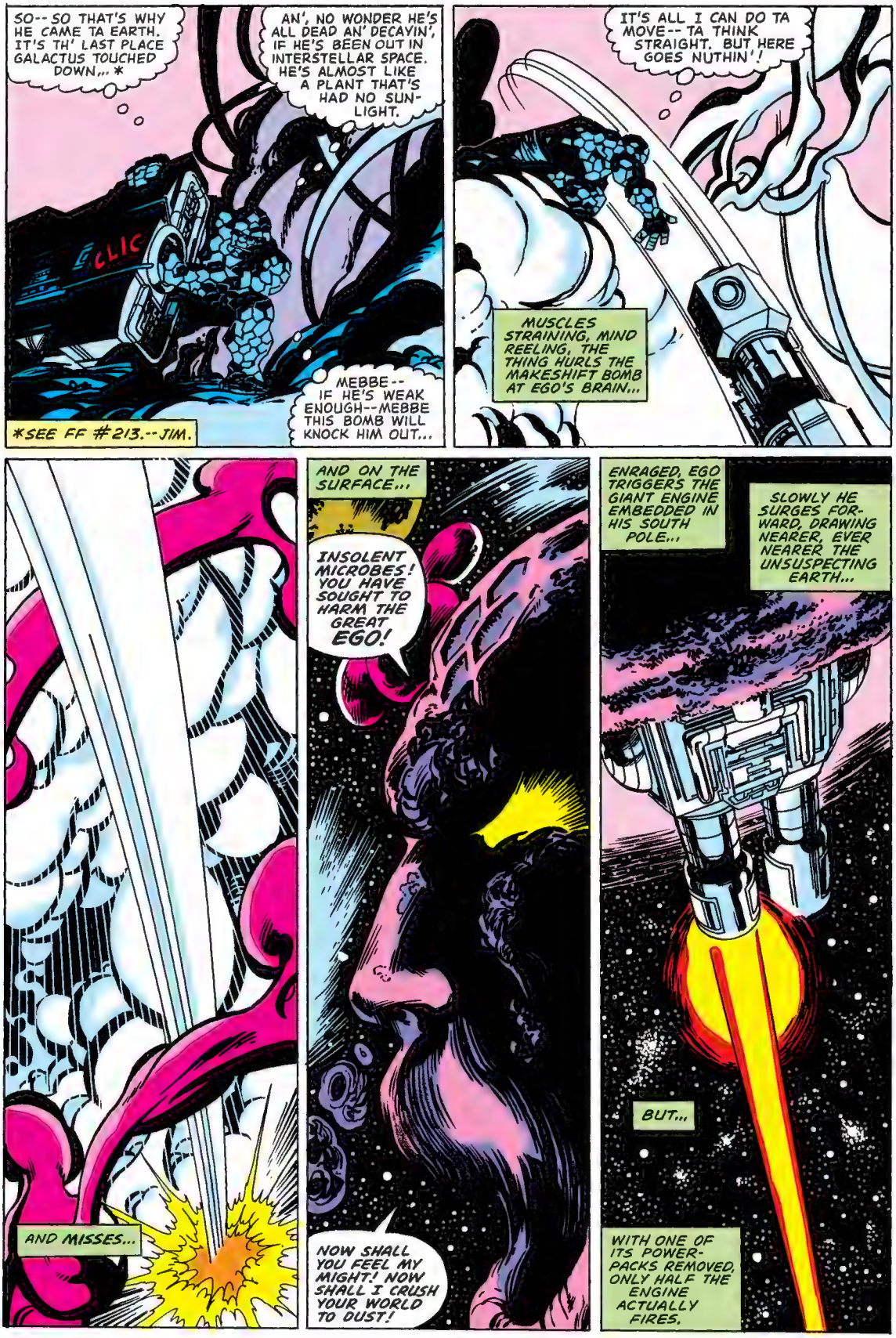

BUT, THE THING'S BRAVADO IS SHORT-LIVED, AS SOON EVEN HE BEGINS TO SUCCUMB TO THE AWFUL CRUSH OF ATMOSPHERE DEEP WITHIN THE LIVING PLANET.
IT'S NO GOOD! I GOTTA REST. JUST FER A MINUTE... BEFORE I COLLAPSE...
ONLY-- ONLY I DON'T DARE! DON'T KNOW HOW CLOSE EGO IS TA EARTH. DON'T KNOW IF THERE'S STILL TIME TA STOP HIM.
C'MON, GRIMM. MOVE YER MASS...

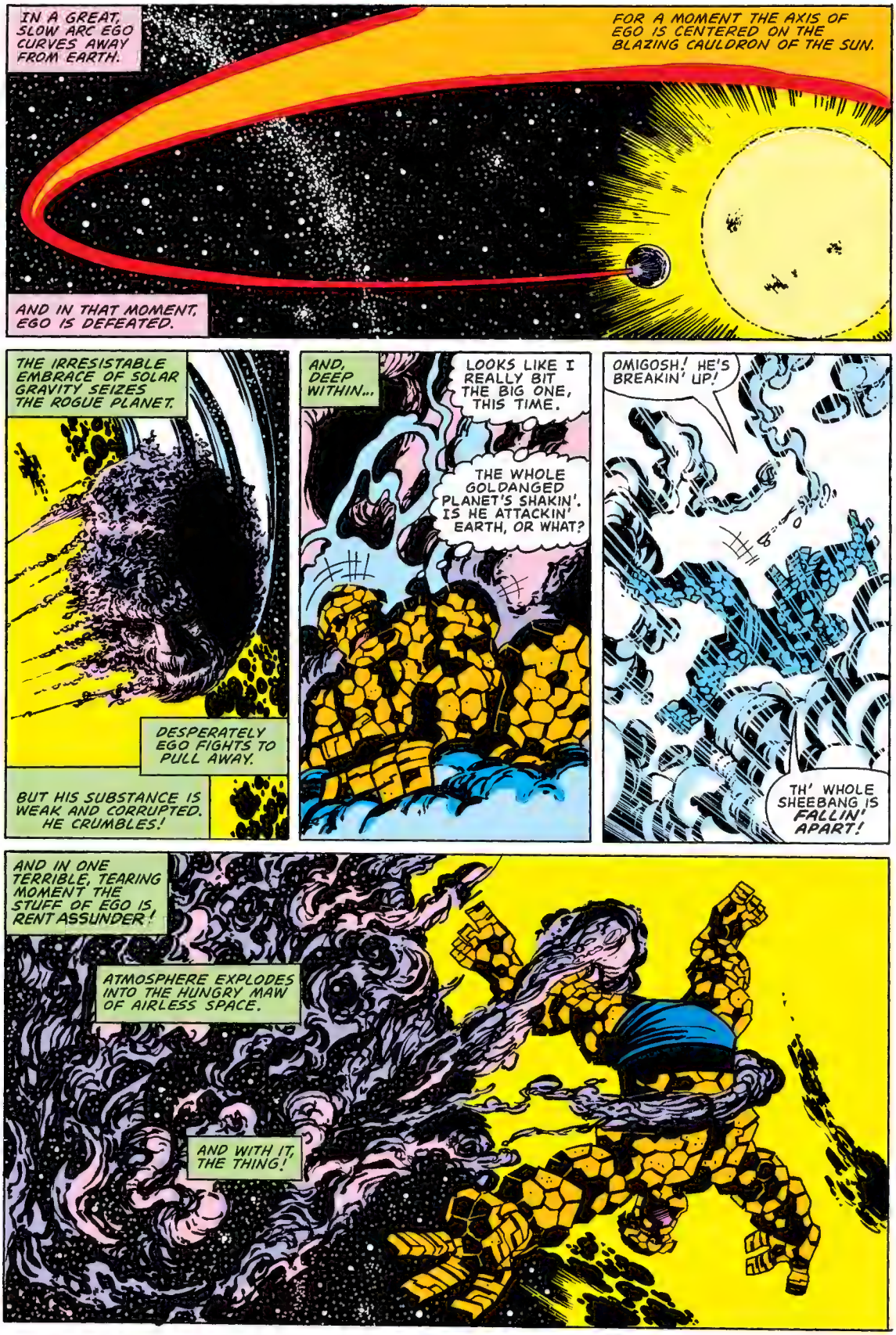
AMONG PILOTS-- THE HOT PILOTS, THE TEST PILOTS, WHO DAILY RISK THEIR LIVES FOR LITTLE MORE THAN THE SHEER JOY OF FLYING-- THEIR IS AN UNSPOKEN CREDO.
THOSE WHO MAKE IT, THOSE WHO SURVIVE, AND LIVE, AND FLY, AND SURVIVE AGAIN, THOSE SPECIAL FEW WHO MAKE IT, DO SO NOT BECAUSE OF COURAGE, OR GUTS, OR BRAVERY. THOSE WORDS ARE NOT PART OF THE HOT PILOT'S VOCABULARY.
NO, THEY MAKE IT BECAUSE THEY ARE THE CHOSEN FEW, THE ELITE. THEY HAVE WHAT TOM WOLFE CALLED THE RIGHT STUFF.
TODAY, TWO HUNDRED MILES BELOW THE SKIN OF A LIVING WORLD, BEN GRIMM PROVES ONCE AGAIN WHAT HIS PILOT BUDDIES ALWAYS KNEW...

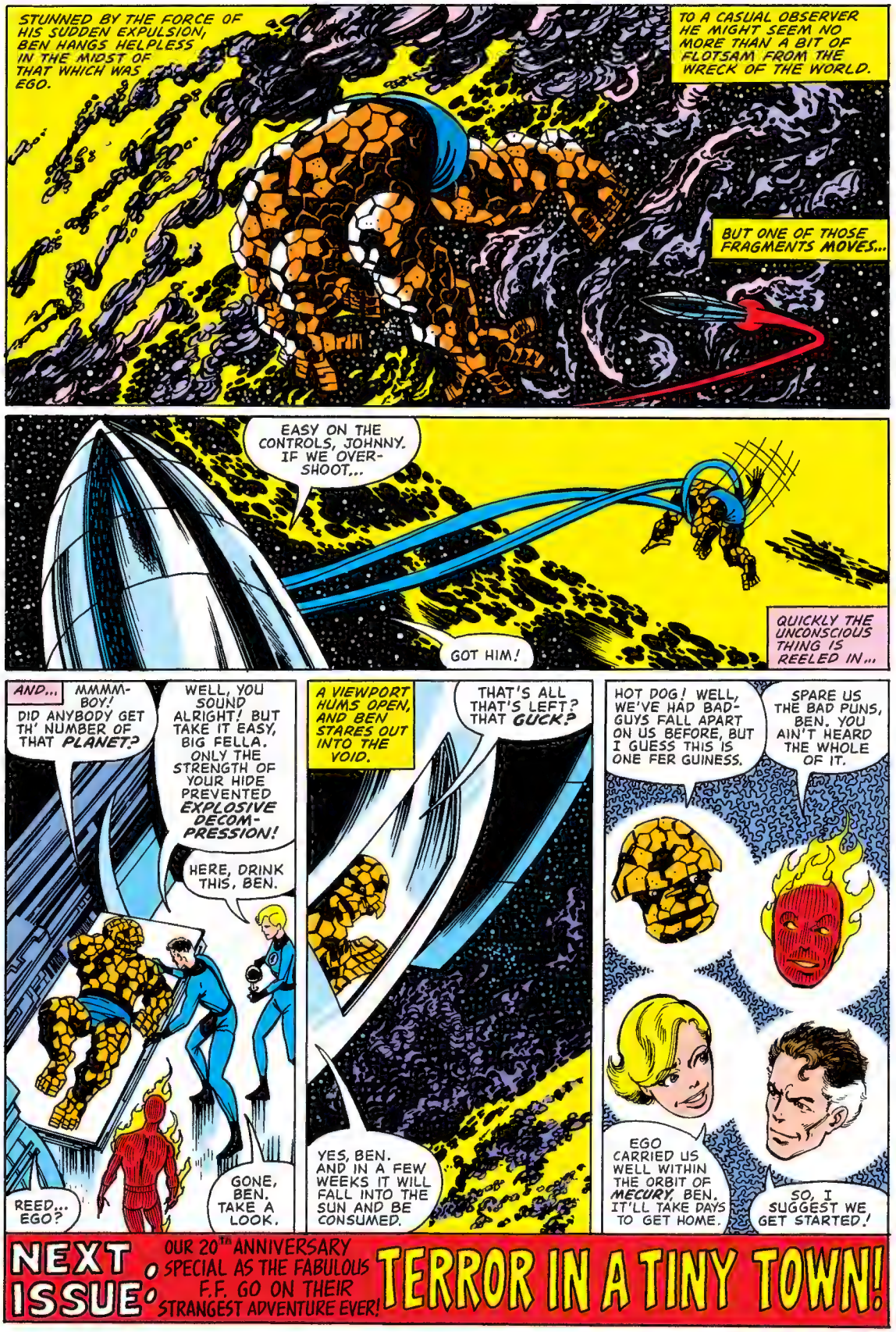

... BEN GRIMM HAS THE RIGHT STUFF.
BUT EVEN THAT CANNOT PREPARE HIM FOR THE SIGHT HE FINDS AROUND THE NEXT CORNER...
HEAT AND PRESSURE ARE FORGOTTEN.
BEN FEELS A SUDDEN CHILL, A SUDDEN LIGHT-HEADEDNESS.
THIS IS IT...

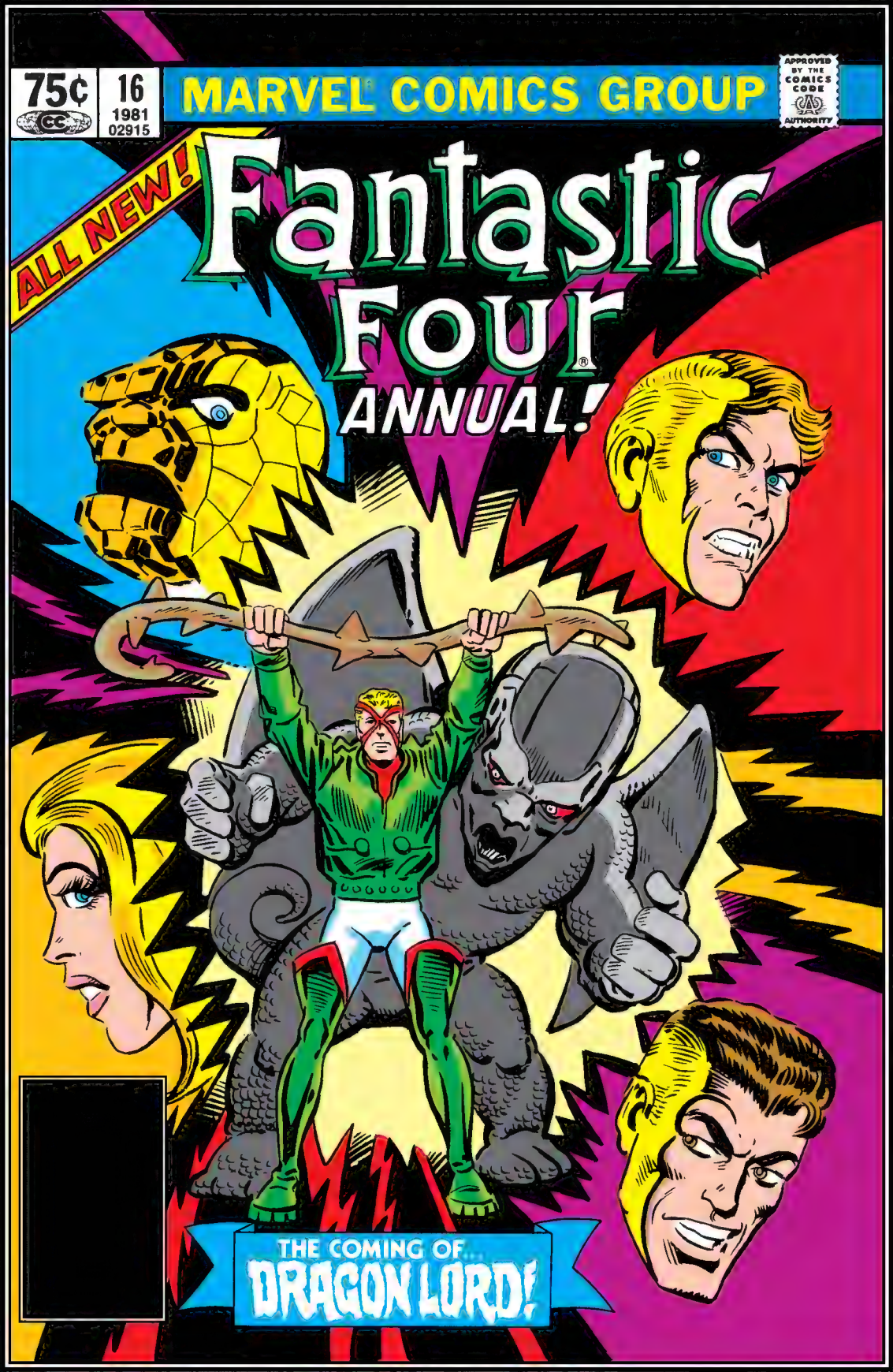

...THE TRUE BRAIN OF THE LIVING PLANET!
HOLY COW! THAT THING MUST BE BIG AS THE MOON!
DOES REED REALLY THINK THIS FIRECRACKER IS GONNA MAKE ANY--ANY-- HEY! WHAT'S HAPPENIN...
TO...
ME...

IT WASHES OVER HIM, A RELENTLESS TIDAL WAVE OF THOUGHT...
HERE IN THIS VAST CHAMBER THE THOUGHT PROCESSES OF EGO'S BRAIN ARE NIGH TANGIBLE THINGS.
AND BEN GRIMM HAS NEITHER THE WIT NOR THE WAY TO CLOSE HIS MIND AGAINST THEM.
HE SEES, HE FEELS, HE KNOWS THE GREAT EMPTINESS OF THE EARLY UNIVERSE...
...THE RADIANT ENERGY OF THE BIG BANG STILL CRACKLES THROUGH THE UNIVERSE...
AND HERE, IN ONE SMALL CORNER OF CREATION, A LUMP, A CLOT OF STAR STUFF BEGINS TO CONGEAL INTO A PLANETARY MASS.
BUT THIS WHIRLPOOL OF GAS AND DUST IS SOMEHOW DIFFERENT...
UNIQUE IN ALL THE BOUNDLESS UNIVERSE IT SEEMS SOMEHOW TO SENSE ITS SURROUNDINGS.
SLOWLY, IT GATHERS COSMIC DEBRIS TO ITSELF. IT GROWS...
IT IS A THINKING, FEELING, ACTING SELF...
CONSCIOUS OF ITSELF, AWARE OF ITS DISTINCTION FROM OBJECTS OF THOUGHT AND PERCEPTION.
IT IS EGO!
AND, LIKE ALL LIVING THINGS, IT HAS A NATURAL ENEMY.
HE WHO IS MORE THAN A MAN, YET LESS THAN A GOD!
HE WHO IS GALACTUS!
TWICE DOES THE LIVING PLANET BATTLE THE DEVOURER OF WORLDS.
THE FIRST TIME, WITH THE AID OF THE THUNDER GOD, THOR, EGO REPULSES GALACTUS.
AND, RESHAPING HIS SURFACE TO SUIT THEIR NEEDS, INVITES THE STAR-SPANNING RACE OF WANDERERS TO SETTLE ON HIM.
IT IS A CRUEL JOKE.
THOR IS NOT LONG DEPARTED WHEN EGO CONSUMES THE WANDERERS.
THEIR SEPARATE IDENTITIES VANISH INTO EGO'S OWN.
THE SECOND TIME, THOR STANDS WITH GALACTUS, AND TOGETHER THEY VANQUISH THE MAD PLANET.
ATTACHING A POWERFUL THRUSTER, THEY BANISH EGO TO THE UNENDING COLD AND DARK OF INTERGALACTIC SPACE!


SO--SO THAT'S WHY HE CAME TA EARTH. IT'S TH' LAST PLACE GALACTUS TOUCHED DOWN... *
AN', NO WONDER HE'S ALL DEAD AN' DECAYIN', IF HE'S BEEN OUT IN INTERSTELLAR SPACE. HE'S ALMOST LIKE A PLANT THAT'S HAD NO SUN-LIGHT.
CLIC
MEBBE--IF HE'S WEAK ENOUGH--MEBBE THIS BOMB WILL KNOCK HIM OUT...
*SEE FF #213.--JIM.
IT'S ALL I CAN DO TA MOVE--TA THINK STRAIGHT. BUT HERE GOES NUTHIN'!
MUSCLES STRAINING, MIND REELING, THE THING HURLS THE MAKESHIFT BOMB AT EGO'S BRAIN...
AND MISSES...
AND ON THE SURFACE...
INSOLENT MICROBES! YOU HAVE SOUGHT TO HARM THE GREAT EGO!
NOW SHALL YOU FEEL MY MIGHT! NOW SHALL I CRUSH YOUR WORLD TO DUST!
ENRAGED, EGO TRIGGERS THE GIANT ENGINE EMBEDDED IN HIS SOUTH POLE...
SLOWLY HE SURGES FORWARD, DRAWING NEARER, EVER NEARER THE UNSUSPECTING EARTH...
BUT...
WITH ONE OF ITS POWER-PACKS REMOVED, ONLY HALF THE ENGINE ACTUALLY FIRES.


IN A GREAT, SLOW ARC EGO CURVES AWAY FROM EARTH.
FOR A MOMENT THE AXIS OF EGO IS CENTERED ON THE BLAZING CAULDRON OF THE SUN.
AND IN THAT MOMENT, EGO IS DEFEATED.
THE IRRESISTABLE EMBRACE OF SOLAR GRAVITY SEIZES THE ROGUE PLANET.
DESPERATELY EGO FIGHTS TO PULL AWAY.
BUT HIS SUBSTANCE IS WEAK AND CORRUPTED. HE CRUMBLES!
AND, DEEP WITHIN...
LOOKS LIKE I REALLY BIT THE BIG ONE, THIS TIME.
THE WHOLE GOLDANGED PLANET'S SHAKIN'. IS HE ATTACKIN' EARTH, OR WHAT?
OMIGOSH! HE'S BREAKIN' UP!
TH' WHOLE SHEEBANG IS FALLIN' APART!
AND IN ONE TERRIBLE, TEARING MOMENT THE STUFF OF EGO IS RENT ASSUNDER!
ATMOSPHERE EXPLODES INTO THE HUNGRY MAW OF AIRLESS SPACE.
AND WITH IT, THE THING!


STUNNED BY THE FORCE OF HIS SUDDEN EXPULSION, BEN HANGS HELPLESS IN THE MIDST OF THAT WHICH WAS EGO.
TO A CASUAL OBSERVER HE MIGHT SEEM NO MORE THAN A BIT OF FLOTSAM FROM THE WRECK OF THE WORLD.
BUT ONE OF THOSE FRAGMENTS MOVES...
EASY ON THE CONTROLS, JOHNNY. IF WE OVER-SHOOT...
GOT HIM!
QUICKLY THE UNCONSCIOUS THING IS REELED IN...
AND... MMMM-BOY! DID ANYBODY GET TH' NUMBER OF THAT PLANET?
WELL, YOU SOUND ALRIGHT! BUT TAKE IT EASY, BIG FELLA. ONLY THE STRENGTH OF YOUR HIDE PREVENTED EXPLOSIVE DECOM-PRESSION!
HERE, DRINK THIS, BEN.
REED... EGO?
GONE, BEN. TAKE A LOOK.
A VIEWPORT HUMS OPEN, AND BEN STARES OUT INTO THE VOID.
THAT'S ALL THAT'S LEFT? THAT GUCK?
YES, BEN. AND IN A FEW WEEKS IT WILL FALL INTO THE SUN AND BE CONSUMED.
HOT DOG! WELL, WE'VE HAD BAD-GUYS FALL APART ON US BEFORE, BUT I GUESS THIS IS ONE FER GUINESS.
SPARE US THE BAD PUNS, BEN. YOU AIN'T HEARD THE WHOLE OF IT.
EGO CARRIED US WELL WITHIN THE ORBIT OF MECURY, BEN. IT'LL TAKE DAYS TO GET HOME.
SO, I SUGGEST WE GET STARTED!
NEXT ISSUE
OUR 20TH ANNIVERSARY SPECIAL AS THE FABULOUS F.F. GO ON THEIR STRANGEST ADVENTURE EVER!
TERROR IN A TINY TOWN!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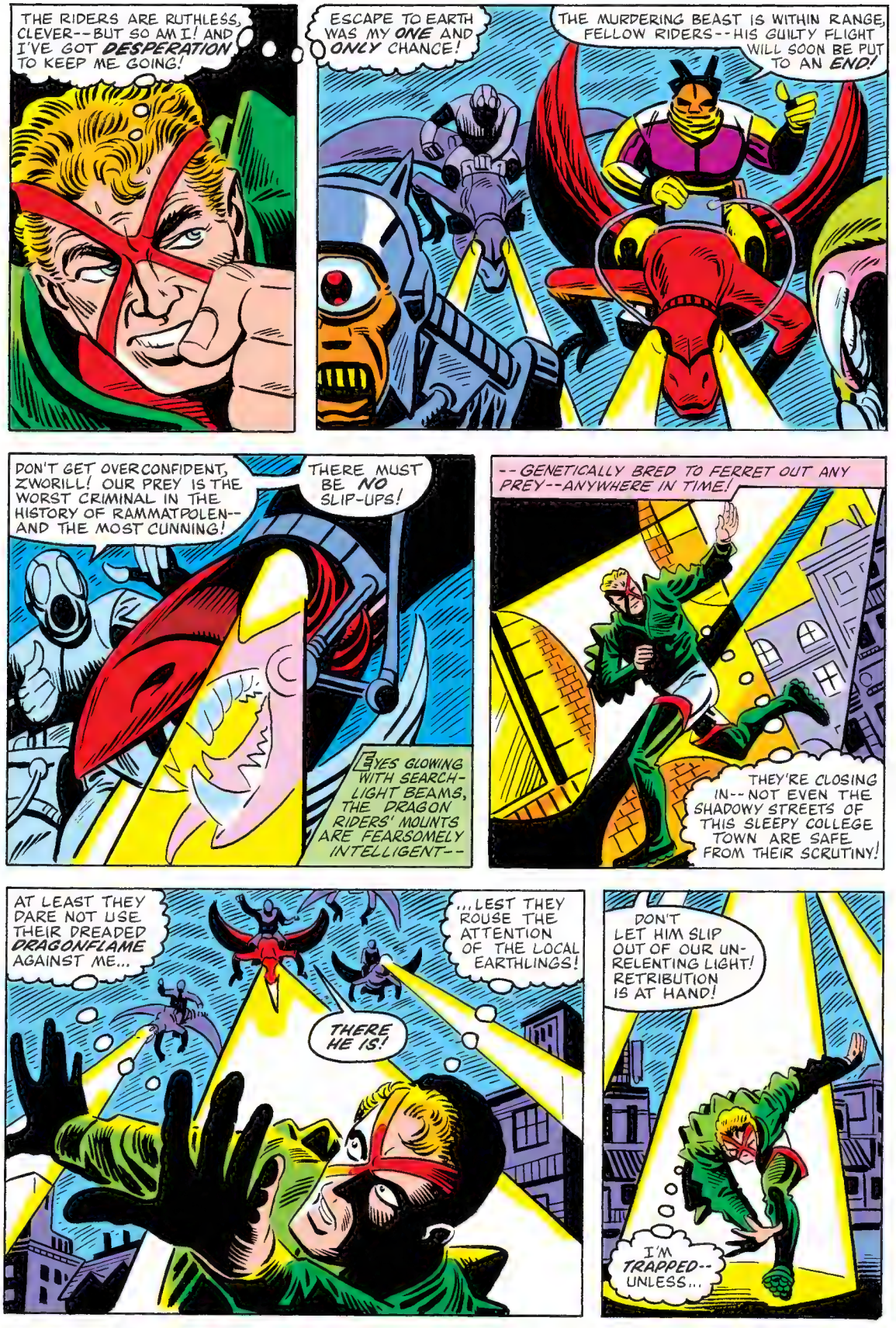
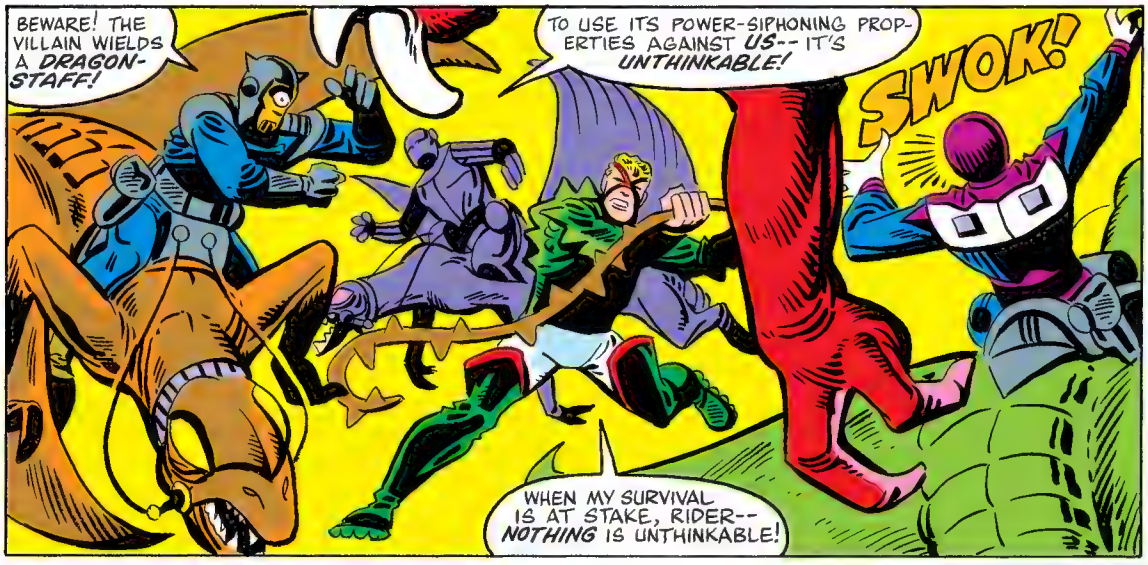
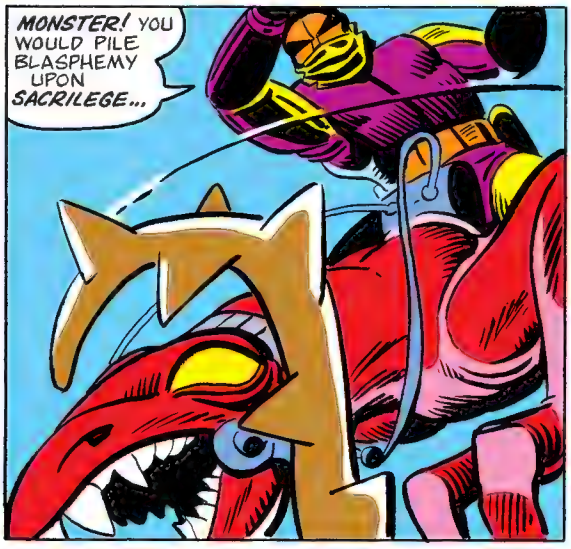
THE COMING OF...
DRAGON LORD!

Stan Lee PRESENTS: THE FABULOUS FANTASTIC FOUR™ ANNUAL!
"The Coming of... DRAGON LORD!"
INTRODUCING: QUITE POSSIBLY THE BOLDEST NEW ADVERSARY THE F.F. WILL EVER FACE! ALSO FEATURING THE EVER-DELIGHTFUL DRAGON MAN!
NO!
THEY'VE FOUND ME! EVEN THROUGH THE TWISTED EDDIES OF TIME ITSELF THE DRAGON RIDERS HAVE MANAGED TO FOLLOW MY TRAIL!
BUT FOR ALL THEIR TECHNOLOGICAL WIZARDRY, THEY'LL NEVER DRAG ME BACK TO FACE PUNISHMENT! SO SWEARS RAL DORN!
BROUGHT TO YOU WITH EXTREME PRIDE AND PREJUDICE BY:
ED HANNIGAN WRITER AND STEVE DITKO ARTIST
RON ZALME LETTERER HANNIGAN COLORIST
DAVID ANTHONY KRAFT EDITOR
JAMES SHOOTER, ESQ DRAGGIN' LORD

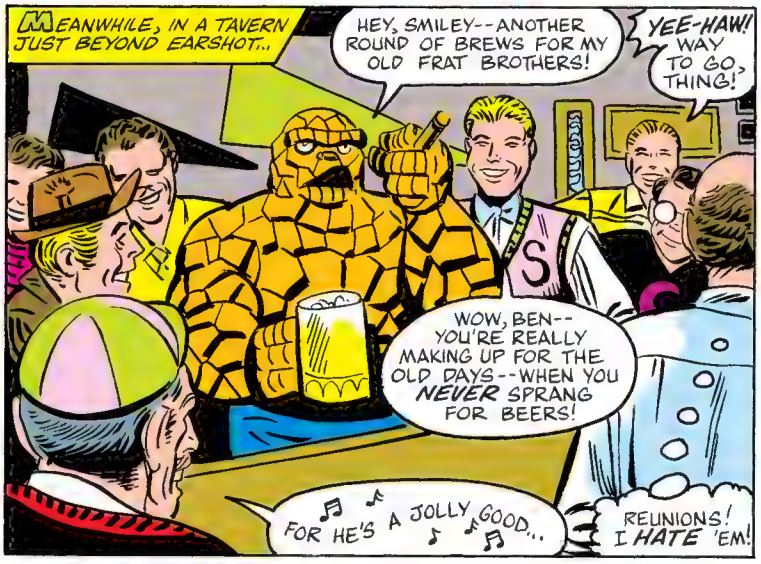

THE RIDERS ARE RUTHLESS, CLEVER--BUT SO AM I! AND I'VE GOT DESPERATION TO KEEP ME GOING!
ESCAPE TO EARTH WAS MY ONE AND ONLY CHANCE!
THE MURDERING BEAST IS WITHIN RANGE, FELLOW RIDERS--HIS GUILTY FLIGHT WILL SOON BE PUT TO AN END!
DON'T GET OVERCONFIDENT, ZWORILL! OUR PREY IS THE WORST CRIMINAL IN THE HISTORY OF RAMMATPOLEN--AND THE MOST CUNNING!
THERE MUST BE NO SLIP-UPS!
EYES GLOWING WITH SEARCH-LIGHT BEAMS, THE DRAGON RIDERS' MOUNTS ARE FEARSOMELY INTELLIGENT--
--GENETICALLY BRED TO FERRET OUT ANY PREY--ANYWHERE IN TIME!
THEY'RE CLOSING IN--NOT EVEN THE SHADOWY STREETS OF THIS SLEEPY COLLEGE TOWN ARE SAFE FROM THEIR SCRUTINY!
AT LEAST THEY DARE NOT USE THEIR DREADED DRAGONFLAME AGAINST ME...
...LEST THEY ROUSE THE ATTENTION OF THE LOCAL EARTHLINGS!
THERE HE IS!
DON'T LET HIM SLIP OUT OF OUR UN-RELENTING LIGHT! RETRIBUTION IS AT HAND!
I'M TRAPPED--UNLESS...

A DARK ALLEY! IT'LL TAKE THEM SEVERAL SECONDS TO RELOCATE ME IN THIS PRIMITIVE MAZE OF WINDING STREETS!
I'VE MADE A CAREER OF STUDYING EARTH AND ITS PECULIARITIES--
--BUT KNOWING THE TURF ISN'T MY ONLY ADVANTAGE!
I HAVE A WEAPON OF INCREDIBLY OFFENSIVE POTENTIAL!
THIS LITTLE ROD LOOKS HARMLESS ENOUGH...
...BUT WHEN I BEND MY WILL TO ITS LIVING SUBSTANCE...
...THE STICK GROWS AND CHANGES FORM! THANKS TO THE BRILLIANCE OF THE SCIENTIFIC MINDS OF RAMMATPOLEN, THE STAFF IS AN ORGANIC ENTITY UNTO ITSELF--
--AND ONE OF THE MOST DANGEROUS DEVICES IN THE UNIVERSE!
I DOUBT THAT THOSE WHO CREATED THIS DEVASTATING TOOL EVER IMAGINED THE USE TO WHICH IT WOULD BE PUT ONE DARK DAY!
IMAGINE! A DRAGONSTAFF-- IN THE HANDS OF A FUGITIVE--
--ITS ENERGY-SAPPING POWERS TURNED AGAINST THE VERY RIDERS IT WAS INTENDED TO PROTECT!
WHILE, ABOVE...
CURSE THIS BACKWATER TIME/SPACE!
I WARNED YOU, ZWORILL! DORN IS OF EARTHLY PARENTAGE!
HE KNOWS THIS WORLD AND ITS WAYS!
LOOK! WE'VE CORNERED HIM!
SO YOU HAVE, RIDER!
AND SO--YOU LEAVE ME NO CHOICE BUT TO STAND--AND FIGHT!

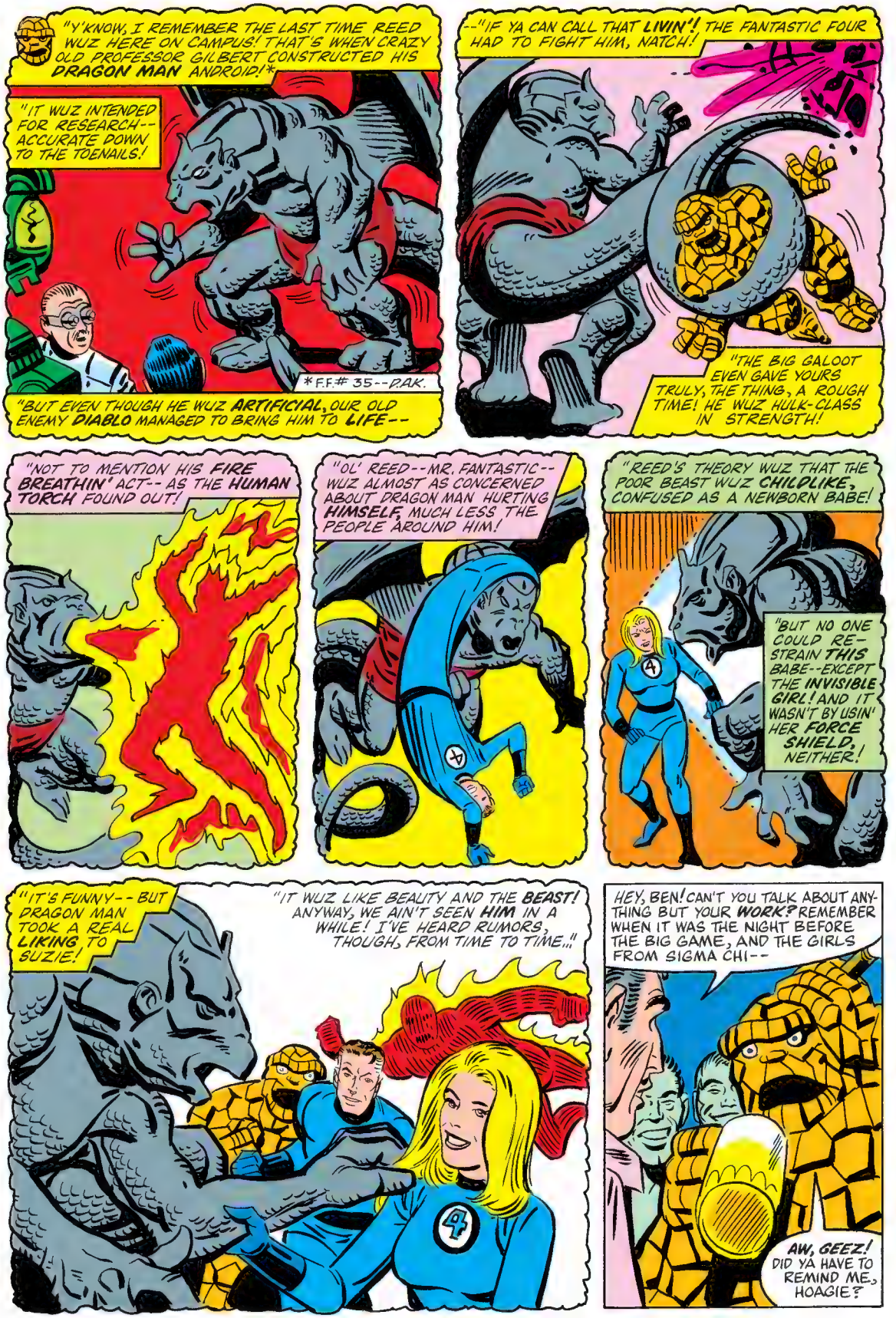

BEWARE! THE VILLAIN WIELDS A DRAGON-STAFF!
TO USE ITS POWER-SIPHONING PROPERTIES AGAINST US-- IT'S UNTHINKABLE!
SWOK!
WHEN MY SURVIVAL IS AT STAKE, RIDER-- NOTHING IS UNTHINKABLE!

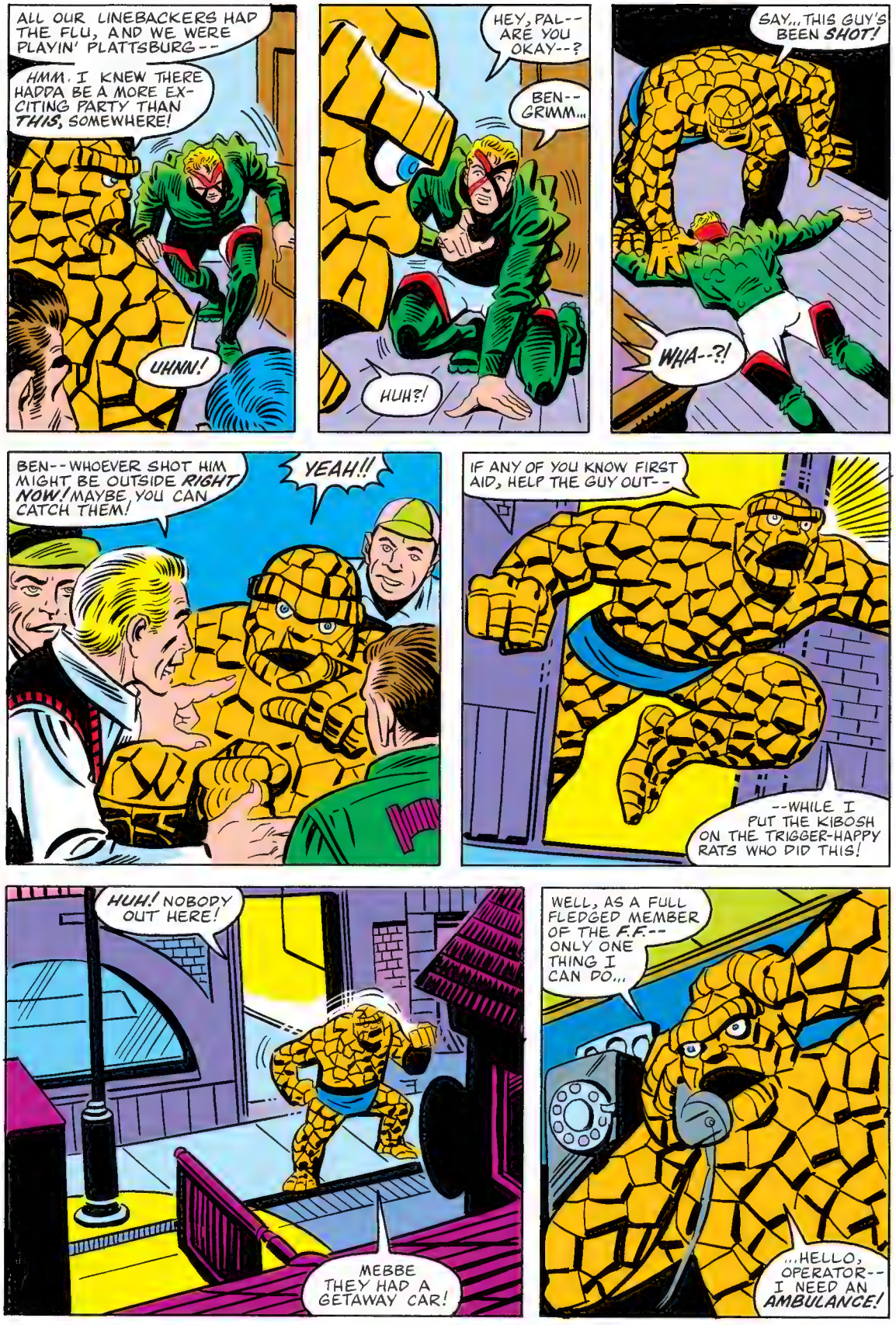

MONSTER! YOU WOULD PILE BLASPHEMY UPON SACRILEGE...

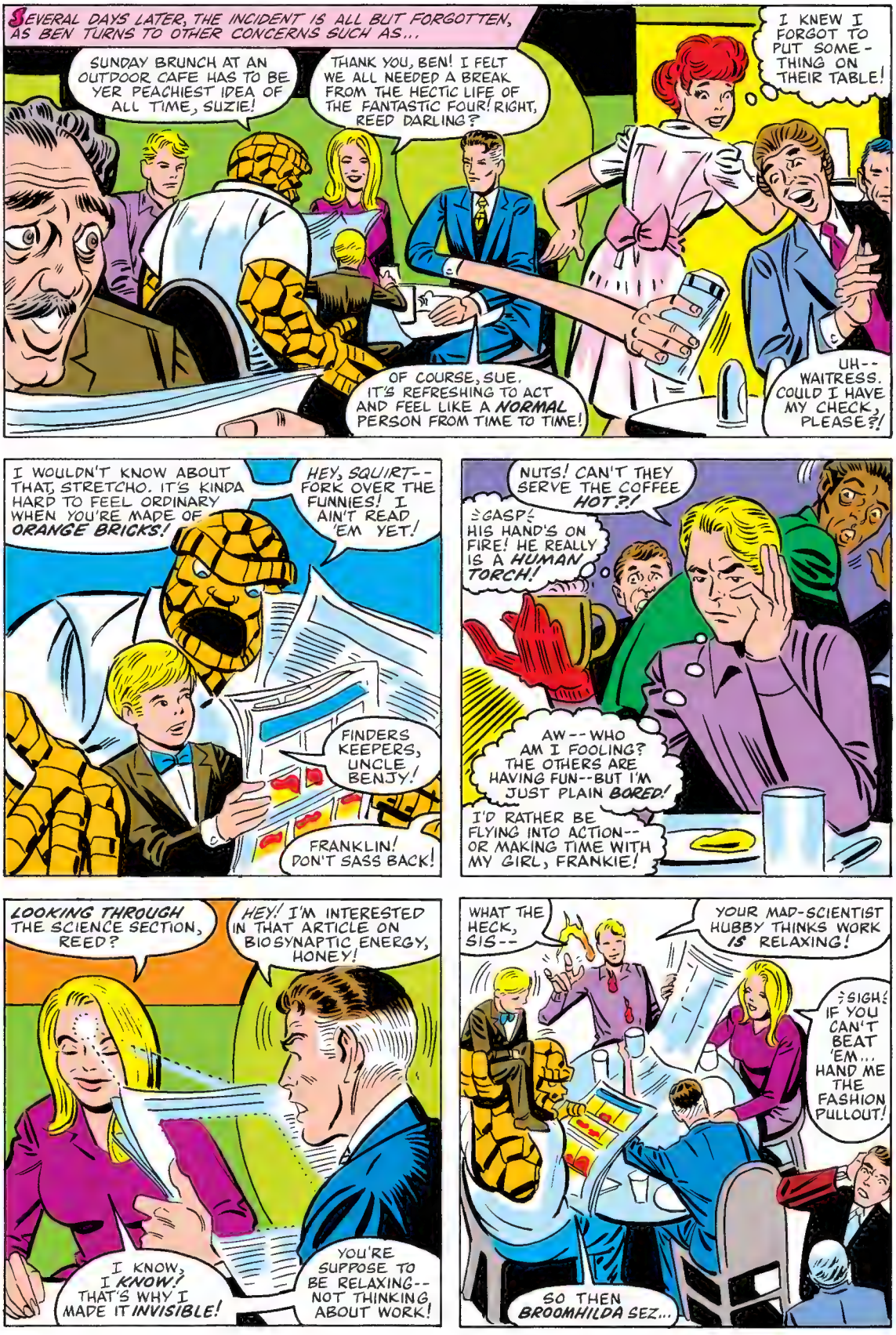
...YET I'LL PUT A FINISH TO IT! YOUR WEAPON WILL NEVER TOUCH ME--WHILE MINE FELLS YOU FROM AFAR!
KRAK!
A PISTOL! =UHNN!=

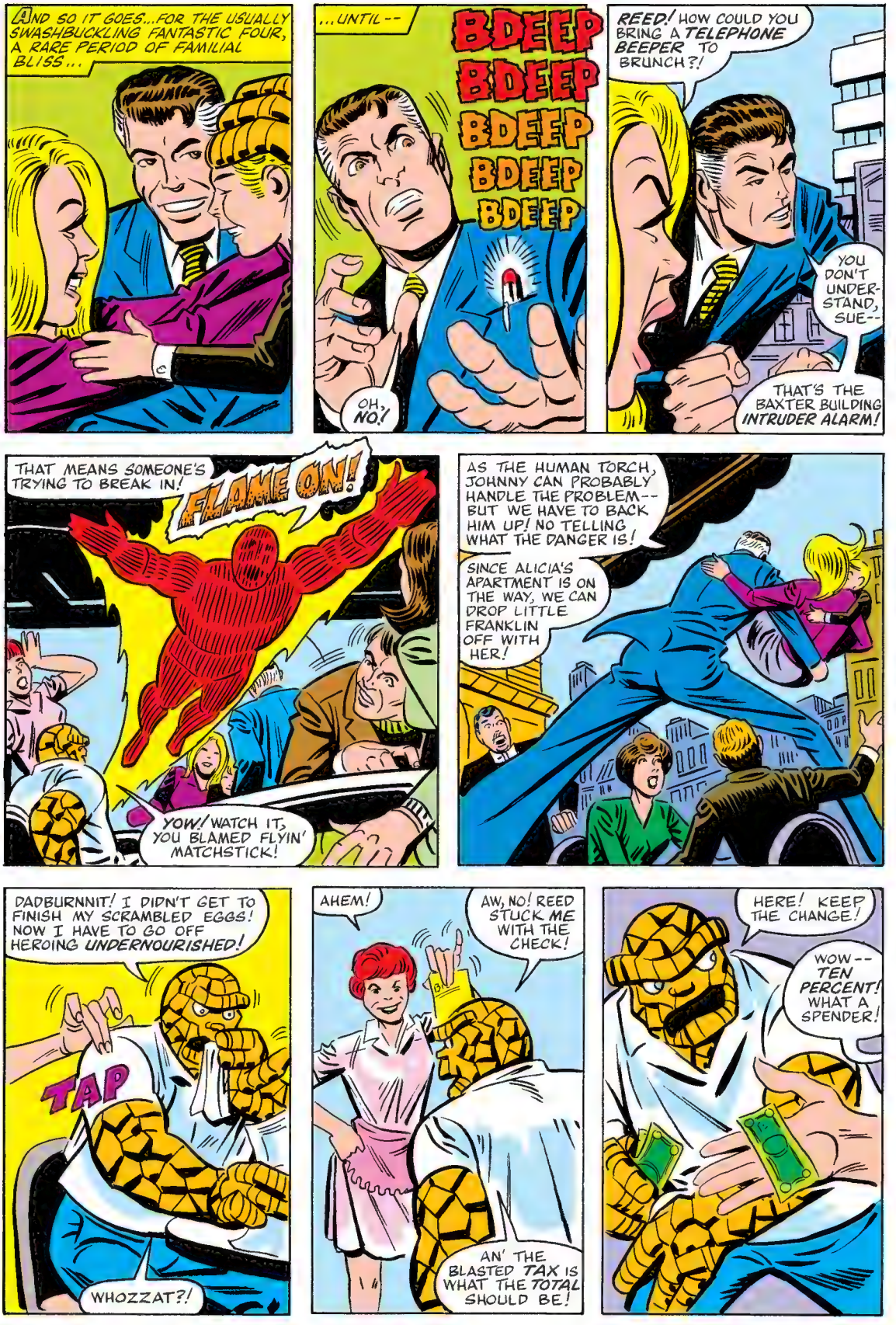

MEANWHILE, IN A TAVERN JUST BEYOND EARSHOT..
HEY, SMILEY--ANOTHER ROUND OF BREWS FOR MY OLD FRAT BROTHERS!
YEE-HAW! WAY TO GO, THING!
WOW, BEN-- YOU'RE REALLY MAKING UP FOR THE OLD DAYS--WHEN YOU NEVER SPRANG FOR BEERS!
FOR HE'S A JOLLY GOOD...
REUNIONS! I HATE 'EM!

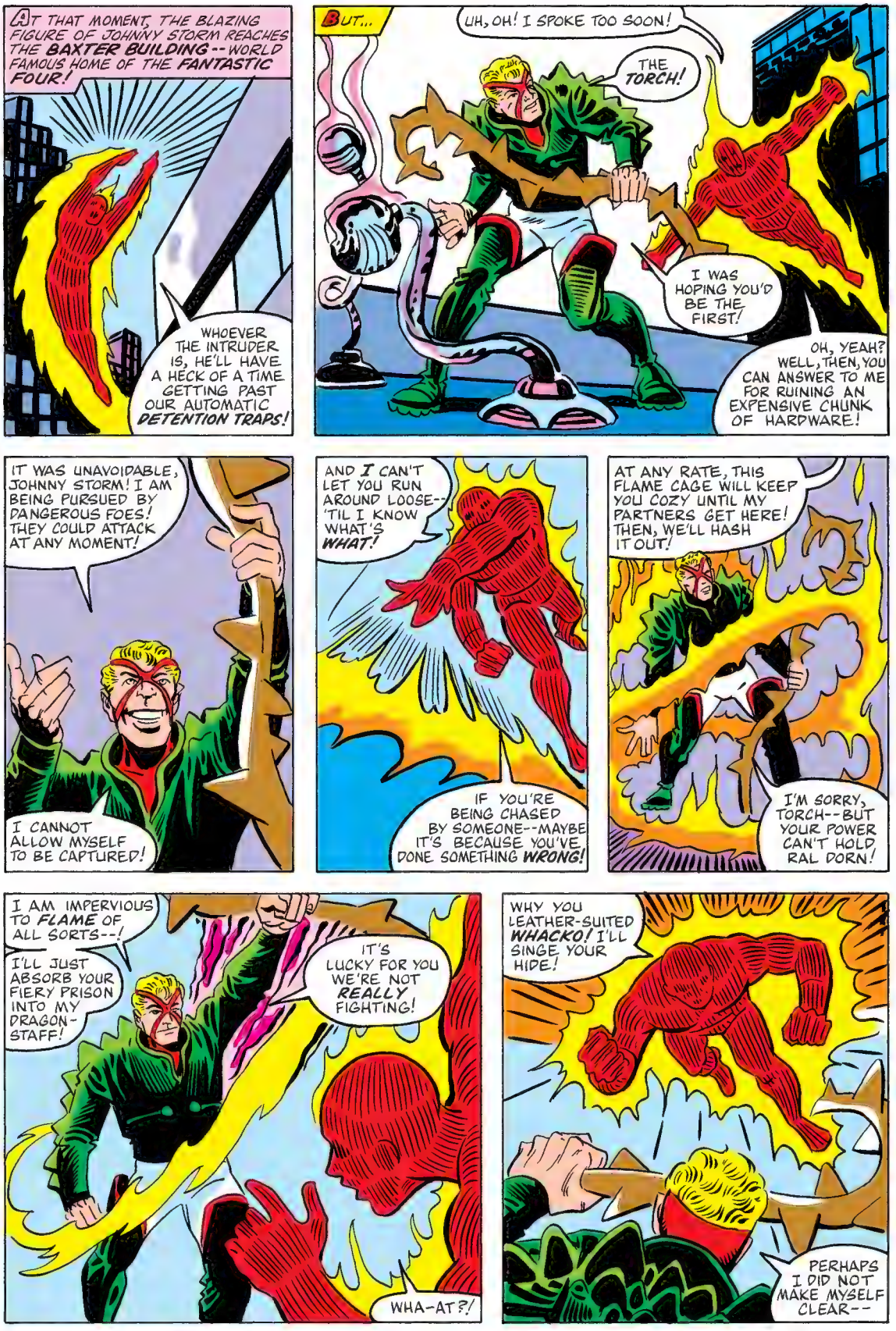
AWRIGHT! PIPE DOWN, YOU BUNCHA BABOONS! BASHFUL BENJAMIN GRIMM'S GONNA PROPOSE A TOAST, NOW--
--TO MY OLD ROOMIE-- REED RICHARDS!
HEY-- THAT EGG-HEAD WASN'T EVEN IN OUR FRAT!
I'M BUYIN'-- SO SHADDUP AND TOAST!

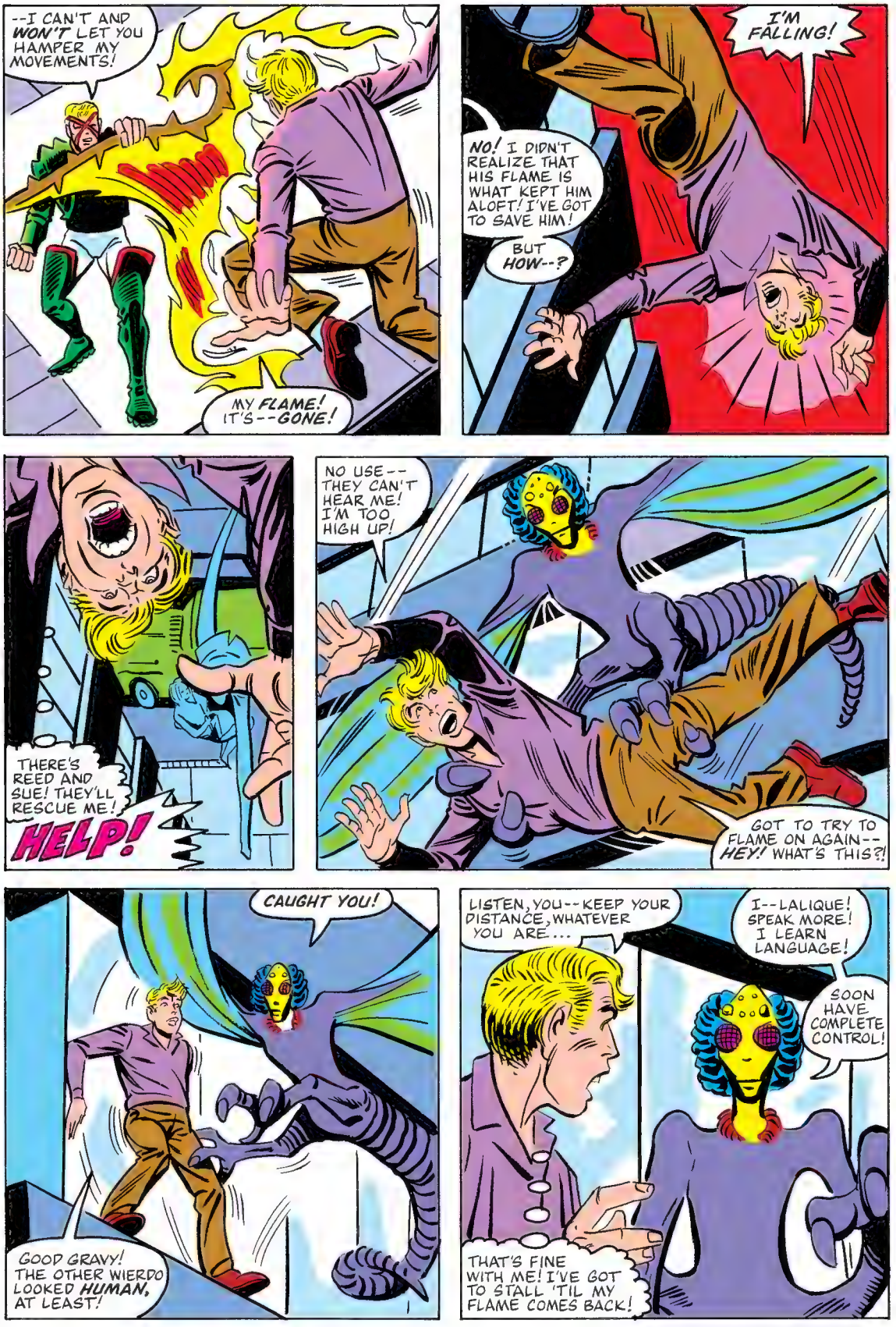

"Y'KNOW, I REMEMBER THE LAST TIME REED WUZ HERE ON CAMPUS! THAT'S WHEN CRAZY OLD PROFESSOR GILBERT CONSTRUCTED HIS DRAGON MAN ANDROID!*
"IT WUZ INTENDED FOR RESEARCH--ACCURATE DOWN TO THE TOENAILS!
*F.F.# 35--P.A.K.
"BUT EVEN THOUGH HE WUZ ARTIFICIAL, OUR OLD ENEMY DIABLO MANAGED TO BRING HIM TO LIFE--
--"IF YA CAN CALL THAT LIVIN'! THE FANTASTIC FOUR HAD TO FIGHT HIM, NATCH!
"THE BIG GALOOT EVEN GAVE YOURS TRULY, THE THING, A ROUGH TIME! HE WUZ HULK-CLASS IN STRENGTH!
"NOT TO MENTION HIS FIRE BREATHIN' ACT--AS THE HUMAN TORCH FOUND OUT!
"OL' REED--MR. FANTASTIC--WUZ ALMOST AS CONCERNED ABOUT DRAGON MAN HURTING HIMSELF, MUCH LESS THE PEOPLE AROUND HIM!
"REED'S THEORY WUZ THAT THE POOR BEAST WUZ CHILDLIKE, CONFUSED AS A NEWBORN BABE!
"BUT NO ONE COULD RESTRAIN THIS BABE--EXCEPT THE INVISIBLE GIRL! AND IT WASN'T BY USIN' HER FORCE SHIELD, NEITHER!
"IT'S FUNNY--BUT DRAGON MAN TOOK A REAL LIKING TO SUZIE!
"IT WUZ LIKE BEAUTY AND THE BEAST! ANYWAY, WE AIN'T SEEN HIM IN A WHILE! I'VE HEARD RUMORS, THOUGH, FROM TIME TO TIME..."
HEY, BEN! CAN'T YOU TALK ABOUT ANYTHING BUT YOUR WORK? REMEMBER WHEN IT WAS THE NIGHT BEFORE THE BIG GAME, AND THE GIRLS FROM SIGMA CHI--
AW, GEEZ! DID YA HAVE TO REMIND ME, HOAGIE?

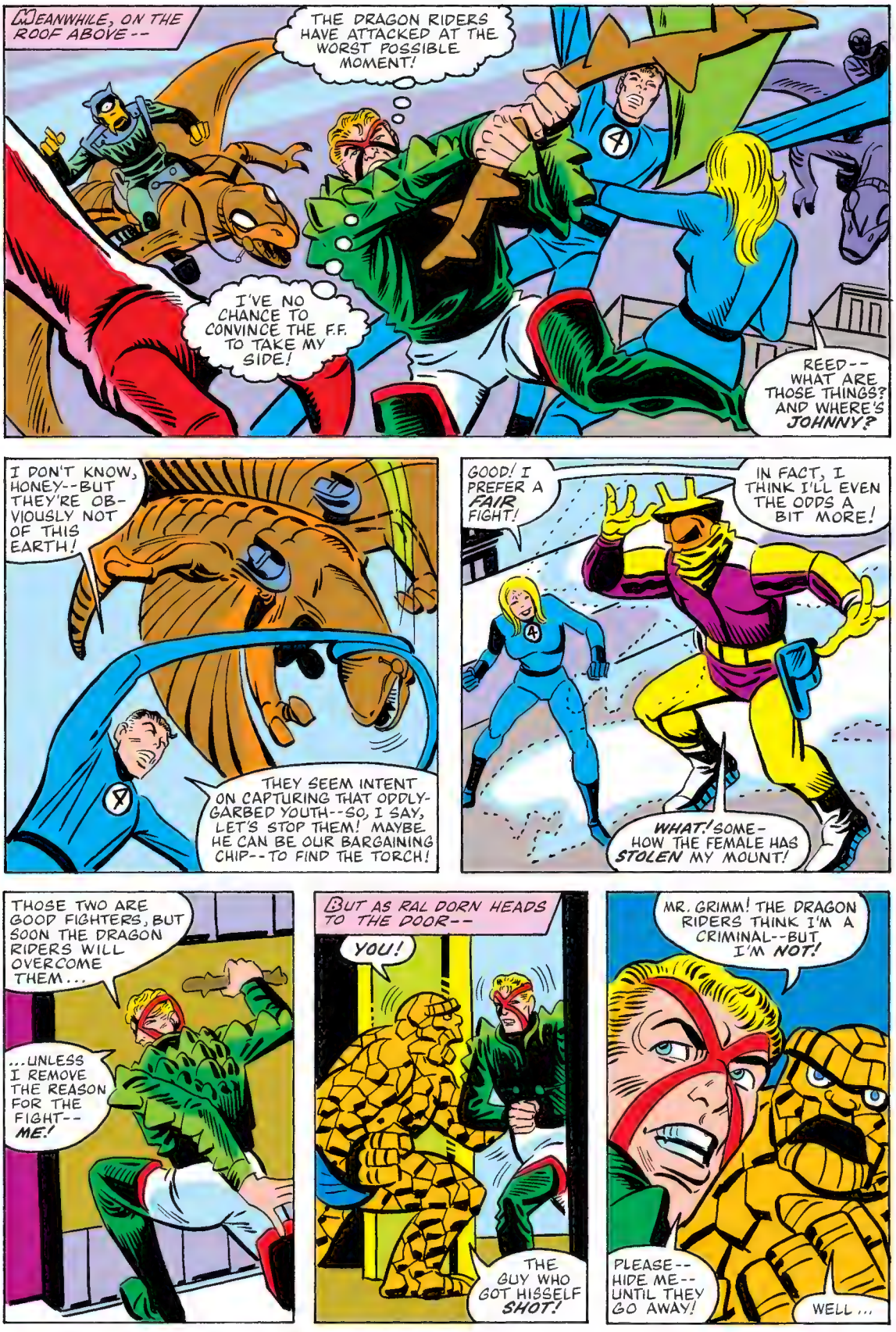

ALL OUR LINEBACKERS HAD THE FLU, AND WE WERE PLAYIN' PLATTSBURG--
HMM. I KNEW THERE HADDA BE A MORE EXCITING PARTY THAN THIS, SOMEWHERE!
UHNN!
HEY, PAL--ARE YOU OKAY--?
BEN--GRIMM...
HUH?!
SAY... THIS GUY'S BEEN SHOT!
WHA--?!
BEN--WHOEVER SHOT HIM MIGHT BE OUTSIDE RIGHT NOW! MAYBE YOU CAN CATCH THEM!
YEAH!!
IF ANY OF YOU KNOW FIRST AID, HELP THE GUY OUT--
--WHILE I PUT THE KIBOSH ON THE TRIGGER-HAPPY RATS WHO DID THIS!
HUH! NOBODY OUT HERE!
MEBBE THEY HAD A GETAWAY CAR!
WELL, AS A FULL FLEDGED MEMBER OF THE F.F.-- ONLY ONE THING I CAN DO...
...HELLO, OPERATOR--I NEED AN AMBULANCE!

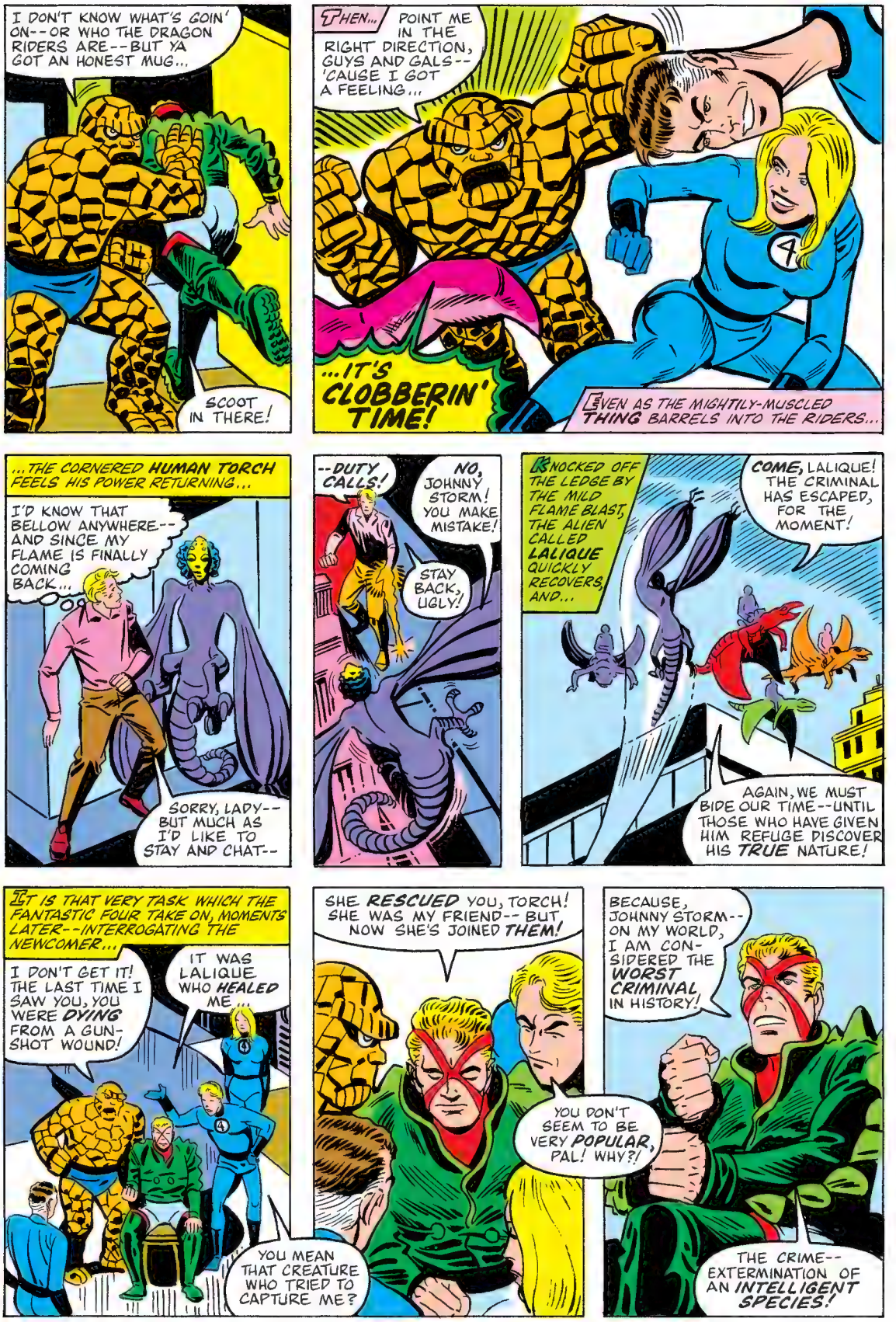

SEVERAL DAYS LATER, THE INCIDENT IS ALL BUT FORGOTTEN, AS BEN TURNS TO OTHER CONCERNS SUCH AS...
SUNDAY BRUNCH AT AN OUTDOOR CAFE HAS TO BE YER PEACHIEST IDEA OF ALL TIME, SUZIE!
THANK YOU, BEN! I FELT WE ALL NEEDED A BREAK FROM THE HECTIC LIFE OF THE FANTASTIC FOUR! RIGHT, REED DARLING?
I KNEW I FORGOT TO PUT SOMETHING ON THEIR TABLE!
OF COURSE, SUE. IT'S REFRESHING TO ACT AND FEEL LIKE A NORMAL PERSON FROM TIME TO TIME!
UH-- WAITRESS. COULD I HAVE MY CHECK, PLEASE?!
I WOULDN'T KNOW ABOUT THAT, STRETCHO. IT'S KINDA HARD TO FEEL ORDINARY WHEN YOU'RE MADE OF ORANGE BRICKS!
HEY, SQUIRT-- FORK OVER THE FUNNIES! I AIN'T READ 'EM YET!
FINDERS KEEPERS, UNCLE BENJY!
FRANKLIN! DON'T SASS BACK!
NUTS! CAN'T THEY SERVE THE COFFEE HOT?!
GASP! HIS HAND'S ON FIRE! HE REALLY IS A HUMAN TORCH!
AW-- WHO AM I FOOLING? THE OTHERS ARE HAVING FUN--BUT I'M JUST PLAIN BORED!
I'D RATHER BE FLYING INTO ACTION-- OR MAKING TIME WITH MY GIRL, FRANKIE!
LOOKING THROUGH THE SCIENCE SECTION, REED?
HEY! I'M INTERESTED IN THAT ARTICLE ON BIOSYNAPTIC ENERGY, HONEY!
I KNOW, I KNOW! THAT'S WHY I MADE IT INVISIBLE!
YOU'RE SUPPOSE TO BE RELAXING-- NOT THINKING ABOUT WORK!
WHAT THE HECK, SIS--
YOUR MAD-SCIENTIST HUBBY THINKS WORK IS RELAXING!
SIGH! IF YOU CAN'T BEAT 'EM... HAND ME THE FASHION PULLOUT!
SO THEN BROOMHILDA SEZ...

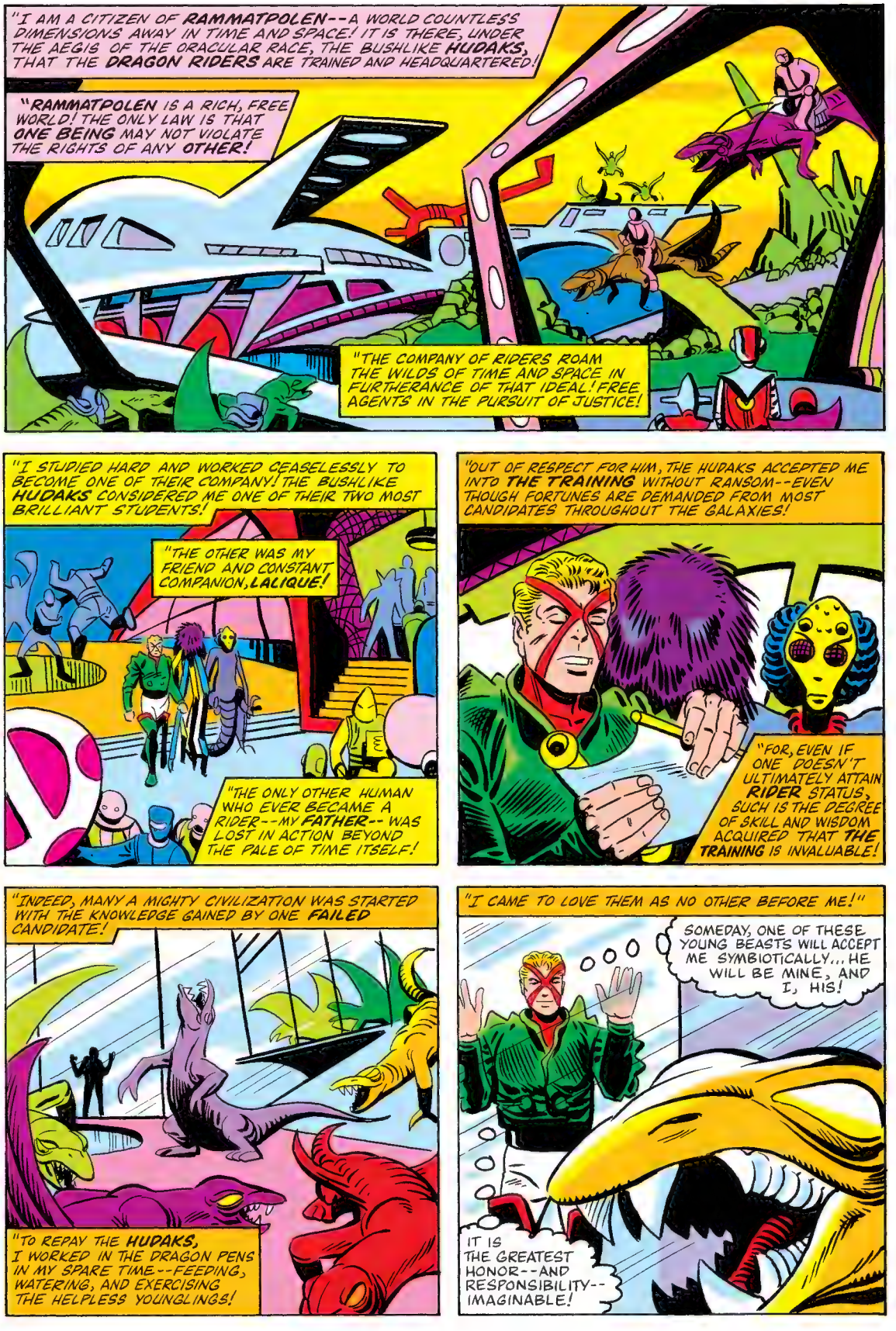

AND SO IT GOES...FOR THE USUALLY SWASHBUCKLING FANTASTIC FOUR, A RARE PERIOD OF FAMILIAL BLISS...
...UNTIL--
BDEEP
BDEEP
BDEEP
BDEEP
BDEEP
OH, NO!
REED! HOW COULD YOU BRING A TELEPHONE BEEPER TO BRUNCH?!
YOU DON'T UNDERSTAND, SUE--
THAT'S THE BAXTER BUILDING INTRUDER ALARM!
THAT MEANS SOMEONE'S TRYING TO BREAK IN!
FLAME ON!
YOW! WATCH IT, YOU BLAMED FLYIN' MATCHSTICK!
AS THE HUMAN TORCH, JOHNNY CAN PROBABLY HANDLE THE PROBLEM--BUT WE HAVE TO BACK HIM UP! NO TELLING WHAT THE DANGER IS!
SINCE ALICIA'S APARTMENT IS ON THE WAY, WE CAN DROP LITTLE FRANKLIN OFF WITH HER!
DADBURNNIT! I DIDN'T GET TO FINISH MY SCRAMBLED EGGS! NOW I HAVE TO GO OFF HEROING UNDERNOURISHED!
TAP
WHOZZAT?!
AHEM!
AW, NO! REED STUCK ME WITH THE CHECK!
AN' THE BLASTED TAX IS WHAT THE TOTAL SHOULD BE!
HERE! KEEP THE CHANGE!
WOW--TEN PERCENT! WHAT A SPENDER!


AT THAT MOMENT, THE BLAZING FIGURE OF JOHNNY STORM REACHES THE BAXTER BUILDING -- WORLD FAMOUS HOME OF THE FANTASTIC FOUR!
WHOEVER THE INTRUDER IS, HE'LL HAVE A HECK OF A TIME GETTING PAST OUR AUTOMATIC DETENTION TRAPS!
BUT...
UH, OH! I SPOKE TOO SOON!
THE TORCH!
I WAS HOPING YOU'D BE THE FIRST!
OH, YEAH? WELL, THEN, YOU CAN ANSWER TO ME FOR RUINING AN EXPENSIVE CHUNK OF HARDWARE!
IT WAS UNAVOIDABLE, JOHNNY STORM! I AM BEING PURSUED BY DANGEROUS FOES! THEY COULD ATTACK AT ANY MOMENT!
I CANNOT ALLOW MYSELF TO BE CAPTURED!
AND I CAN'T LET YOU RUN AROUND LOOSE-- 'TIL I KNOW WHAT'S WHAT!
IF YOU'RE BEING CHASED BY SOMEONE--MAYBE IT'S BECAUSE YOU'VE DONE SOMETHING WRONG!
AT ANY RATE, THIS FLAME CAGE WILL KEEP YOU COZY UNTIL MY PARTNERS GET HERE! THEN, WE'LL HASH IT OUT!
I'M SORRY, TORCH--BUT YOUR POWER CAN'T HOLD RAL DORN!
I AM IMPERVIOUS TO FLAME OF ALL SORTS--!
I'LL JUST ABSORB YOUR FIERY PRISON INTO MY DRAGON-STAFF!
IT'S LUCKY FOR YOU WE'RE NOT REALLY FIGHTING!
WHA-AT?!
WHY YOU LEATHER-SUITED WHACKO! I'LL SINGE YOUR HIDE!
PERHAPS I DID NOT MAKE MYSELF CLEAR--

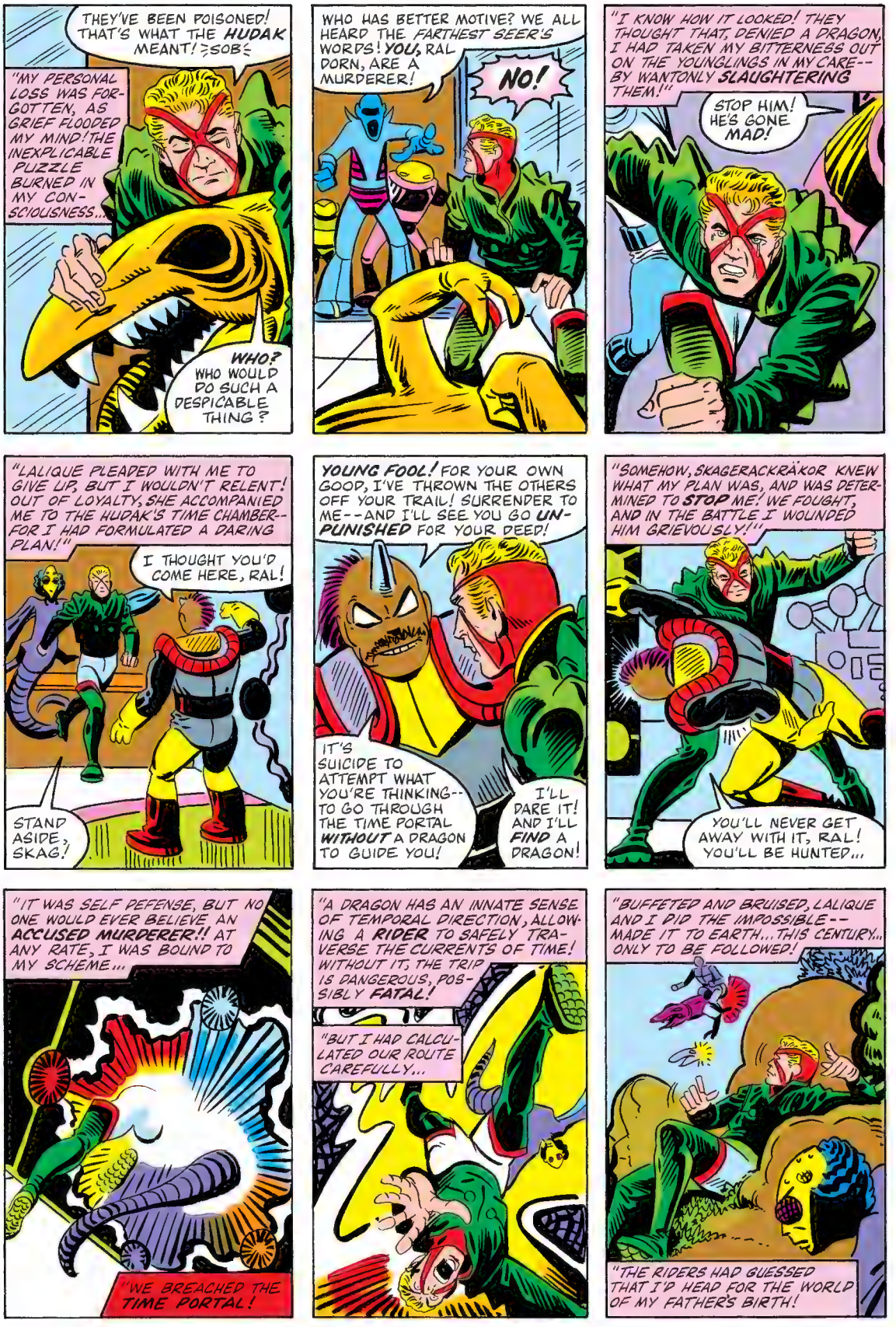

--I CAN'T AND WON'T LET YOU HAMPER MY MOVEMENTS!
MY FLAME! IT'S--GONE!
I'M FALLING!
NO! I DIDN'T REALIZE THAT HIS FLAME IS WHAT KEPT HIM ALOFT! I'VE GOT TO SAVE HIM!
BUT HOW--?
THERE'S REED AND SUE! THEY'LL RESCUE ME!
HELP!
NO USE--THEY CAN'T HEAR ME! I'M TOO HIGH UP!
GOT TO TRY TO FLAME ON AGAIN--HEY! WHAT'S THIS?!
CAUGHT YOU!
GOOD GRAVY! THE OTHER WIERDO LOOKED HUMAN, AT LEAST!
LISTEN, YOU--KEEP YOUR DISTANCE, WHATEVER YOU ARE...
I--LALIQUE! SPEAK MORE! I LEARN LANGUAGE!
SOON HAVE COMPLETE CONTROL!
THAT'S FINE WITH ME! I'VE GOT TO STALL 'TIL MY FLAME COMES BACK!

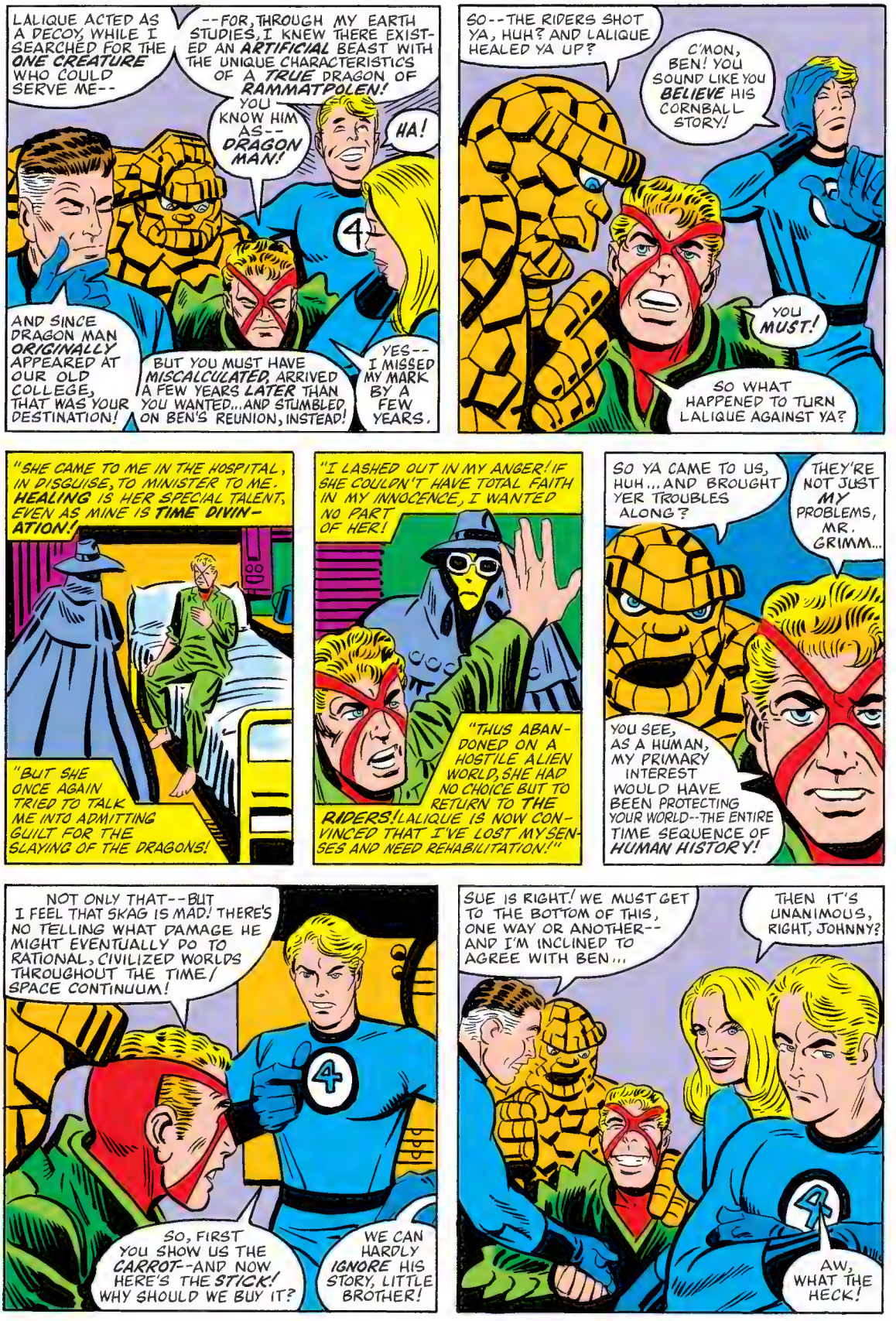

MEANWHILE, ON THE ROOF ABOVE--
THE DRAGON RIDERS HAVE ATTACKED AT THE WORST POSSIBLE MOMENT!
I'VE NO CHANCE TO CONVINCE THE F.F. TO TAKE MY SIDE!
REED-- WHAT ARE THOSE THINGS? AND WHERE'S JOHNNY?
I DON'T KNOW, HONEY--BUT THEY'RE OBVIOUSLY NOT OF THIS EARTH!
THEY SEEM INTENT ON CAPTURING THAT ODDLY-GARBED YOUTH--SO, I SAY, LET'S STOP THEM! MAYBE HE CAN BE OUR BARGAINING CHIP--TO FIND THE TORCH!
GOOD! I PREFER A FAIR FIGHT!
IN FACT, I THINK I'LL EVEN THE ODDS A BIT MORE!
WHAT! SOME-HOW THE FEMALE HAS STOLEN MY MOUNT!
THOSE TWO ARE GOOD FIGHTERS, BUT SOON THE DRAGON RIDERS WILL OVERCOME THEM...
...UNLESS I REMOVE THE REASON FOR THE FIGHT-- ME!
BUT AS RAL DORN HEADS TO THE DOOR--
YOU!
THE GUY WHO GOT HISSELF SHOT!
MR. GRIMM! THE DRAGON RIDERS THINK I'M A CRIMINAL--BUT I'M NOT!
PLEASE-- HIDE ME-- UNTIL THEY GO AWAY!
WELL...

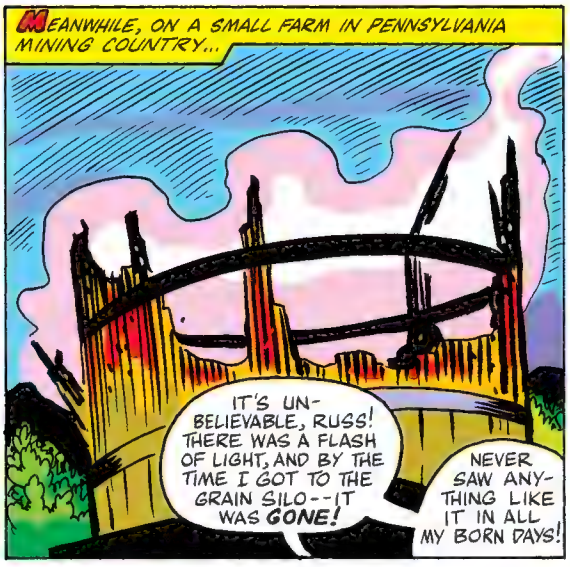

I DON'T KNOW WHAT'S GOIN' ON--OR WHO THE DRAGON RIDERS ARE--BUT YA GOT AN HONEST MUG...
SCOOT IN THERE!
THEN... POINT ME IN THE RIGHT DIRECTION, GUYS AND GALS--'CAUSE I GOT A FEELING...
...IT'S CLOBBERIN' TIME!
EVEN AS THE MIGHTILY-MUSCLED THING BARRELS INTO THE RIDERS...
...THE CORNERED HUMAN TORCH FEELS HIS POWER RETURNING...
I'D KNOW THAT BELLOW ANYWHERE--AND SINCE MY FLAME IS FINALLY COMING BACK...
SORRY, LADY--BUT MUCH AS I'D LIKE TO STAY AND CHAT--
--DUTY CALLS!
NO, JOHNNY STORM! YOU MAKE MISTAKE!
STAY BACK, UGLY!
KNOCKED OFF THE LEDGE BY THE MILD FLAME BLAST, THE ALIEN CALLED LALIQUE QUICKLY RECOVERS, AND...
COME, LALIQUE! THE CRIMINAL HAS ESCAPED, FOR THE MOMENT!
AGAIN, WE MUST BIDE OUR TIME--UNTIL THOSE WHO HAVE GIVEN HIM REFUGE DISCOVER HIS TRUE NATURE!
IT IS THAT VERY TASK WHICH THE FANTASTIC FOUR TAKE ON, MOMENTS LATER--INTERROGATING THE NEWCOMER...
I DON'T GET IT! THE LAST TIME I SAW YOU, YOU WERE DYING FROM A GUN-SHOT WOUND!
IT WAS LALIQUE WHO HEALED ME...
YOU MEAN THAT CREATURE WHO TRIED TO CAPTURE ME?
SHE RESCUED YOU, TORCH! SHE WAS MY FRIEND--BUT NOW SHE'S JOINED THEM!
YOU DON'T SEEM TO BE VERY POPULAR, PAL! WHY?!
BECAUSE, JOHNNY STORM--ON MY WORLD, I AM CONSIDERED THE WORST CRIMINAL IN HISTORY!
THE CRIME--EXTERMINATION OF AN INTELLIGENT SPECIES!

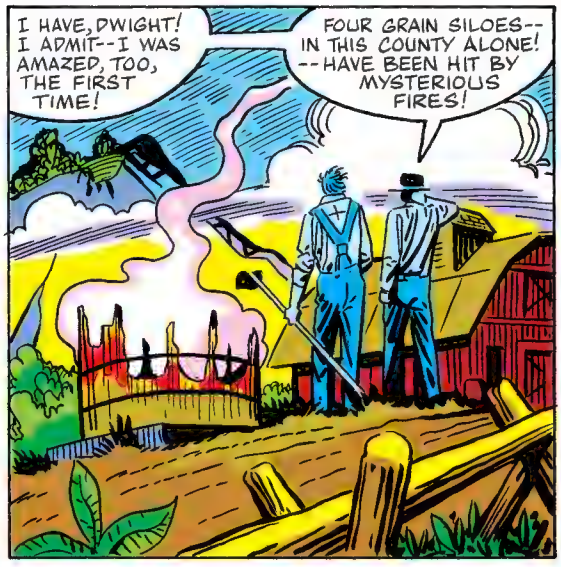

"I AM A CITIZEN OF RAMMATPOLEN--A WORLD COUNTLESS DIMENSIONS AWAY IN TIME AND SPACE! IT IS THERE, UNDER THE AEGIS OF THE ORACULAR RACE, THE BUSHLIKE HUDAKS, THAT THE DRAGON RIDERS ARE TRAINED AND HEADQUARTERED!
"RAMMATPOLEN IS A RICH, FREE WORLD! THE ONLY LAW IS THAT ONE BEING MAY NOT VIOLATE THE RIGHTS OF ANY OTHER!
"THE COMPANY OF RIDERS ROAM THE WILDS OF TIME AND SPACE IN FURTHERANCE OF THAT IDEAL! FREE AGENTS IN THE PURSUIT OF JUSTICE!
"I STUDIED HARD AND WORKED CEASELESSLY TO BECOME ONE OF THEIR COMPANY! THE BUSHLIKE HUDAKS CONSIDERED ME ONE OF THEIR TWO MOST BRILLIANT STUDENTS!
"THE OTHER WAS MY FRIEND AND CONSTANT COMPANION, LALIQUE!
"THE ONLY OTHER HUMAN WHO EVER BECAME A RIDER--MY FATHER-- WAS LOST IN ACTION BEYOND THE PALE OF TIME ITSELF!
"OUT OF RESPECT FOR HIM, THE HUDAKS ACCEPTED ME INTO THE TRAINING WITHOUT RANSOM--EVEN THOUGH FORTUNES ARE DEMANDED FROM MOST CANDIDATES THROUGHOUT THE GALAXIES!
"FOR, EVEN IF ONE DOESN'T ULTIMATELY ATTAIN RIDER STATUS, SUCH IS THE DEGREE OF SKILL AND WISDOM ACQUIRED THAT THE TRAINING IS INVALUABLE!
"INDEED, MANY A MIGHTY CIVILIZATION WAS STARTED WITH THE KNOWLEDGE GAINED BY ONE FAILED CANDIDATE!
"TO REPAY THE HUDAKS, I WORKED IN THE DRAGON PENS IN MY SPARE TIME--FEEDING, WATERING, AND EXERCISING THE HELPLESS YOUNGLINGS!
"I CAME TO LOVE THEM AS NO OTHER BEFORE ME!"
SOMEDAY, ONE OF THESE YOUNG BEASTS WILL ACCEPT ME SYMBIOTICALLY... HE WILL BE MINE, AND I, HIS!
IT IS THE GREATEST HONOR--AND RESPONSIBILITY--IMAGINABLE!

"AFTER YEARS OF GRUELING WORK, THE DAY ARRIVED AT LAST! LALIQUE AND I WOULD PAY HOMAGE TO THE DRAGONS, AND HOPEFULLY, WE WOULD EACH BE SELECTED BY ONE TO BE A DRAGON'S SYMBIOTE! MEMBERS OF THE COMPANY FROM DISTANT WORLDS TOOK THE TIME TO JOIN THE PAGEANT!
"AT THE HEAD OF THE HONOR GUARD -- SKAGERACKRÄKOR, THE DRAGON LORD, MY FATHER'S OLD FRIEND!
"IT WAS WHISPERED THAT THE CRUEL-MOUTHED LORD HAD BEEN SCARRED PSYCHICALLY IN THE INCIDENT THAT TOOK MY FATHER -- THERE WERE DARK RUMORS OF ABBERANT BEHAVIOR . . . BUT NONE DARED GIVE VOICE TO THESE IN HIS PRESENCE!
"THE MOST EXALTED OF THE HUDAKS -- HIS NAME TRANSLATES AS FARTHEST SEER, GATHERED THE CANDIDATES BEFORE HIM!"
BELOVED PUPILS, RAL AND LALIQUE -- THIS DAY YOU ACHIEVE RIDER STATUS! THE TRAINING BEGINS IN EARNEST NOW!
HOWEVER -- AS YOU WELL KNOW -- WE HUDAKS CAN SOMETIMES SEE THROUGH TIME -- PIERCING THE VEIL TO PERCEIVE WHAT WAS AND WHAT WILL BE!
SADLY, I MUST SAY THAT YOU WILL BOTH BECOME RIDERS IN NAME ONLY!
YOU WILL NEVER BE ACCEPTED BY THE MAGNIFICENT BEASTS OF RAMMATPOLEN!
WHAT?! NOT ACCEPTED? EXPLAIN, TEACHER! HOW HAVE WE FAILED?
HAVE I NOT FULFILLED EVERY REQUIREMENT? EXCELLED AT EVERY TASK?
YOU FEEL THAT YOU DESERVE TO BE A RIDER -- BUT THAT FEELING DOES NOT MAKE IT SO! THERE WILL BE NO DRAGON FOR YOU, RAL DORN!
BAH! YOU SPEAK IN RIDDLES, AS ALWAYS -- BUT THIS TIME THEY ARE EMPTY RIDDLES! THERE IS NO LESSON TO BE LEARNED FROM THIS -- MOCKERY!
"BUT THERE IS ALWAYS SOMETHING TO BE LEARNED FROM A HUDAK'S RIDDLES -- TRUTH, BE IT SWEET OR, AS IN THIS CASE, VILE AND BITTER! I MADE MY WAY BLINDLY TO THE DRAGON PENS WHERE I HAD LABORED AND LOVED . . . ONLY TO FIND --
DEAD! ALL THE YOUNG DRAGONS ARE -- DEAD!
"THE WORDS CAME BACK TO ME -- "THERE WILL BE NO DRAGON FOR YOU, RAL DORN!" THE REALITY WAS UNACCEPTABLE -- YET UNDENIABLE!

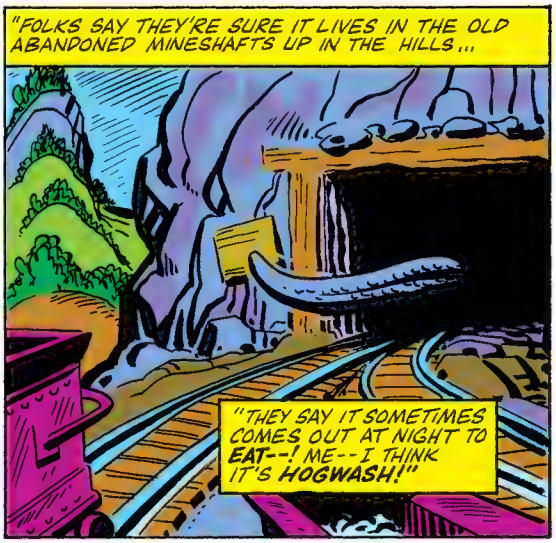

THEY'VE BEEN POISONED! THAT'S WHAT THE HUDAK MEANT! SOB
"MY PERSONAL LOSS WAS FORGOTTEN, AS GRIEF FLOODED MY MIND! THE INEXPLICABLE PUZZLE BURNED IN MY CONSCIOUSNESS...
WHO? WHO WOULD DO SUCH A DESPICABLE THING?
WHO HAS BETTER MOTIVE? WE ALL HEARD THE FARTHEST SEER'S WORDS! YOU, RAL DORN, ARE A MURDERER!
NO!
"I KNOW HOW IT LOOKED! THEY THOUGHT THAT, DENIED A DRAGON, I HAD TAKEN MY BITTERNESS OUT ON THE YOUNGLINGS IN MY CARE--BY WANTONLY SLAUGHTERING THEM!"
STOP HIM! HE'S GONE MAD!
"LALIQUE PLEADED WITH ME TO GIVE UP, BUT I WOULDN'T RELENT! OUT OF LOYALTY, SHE ACCOMPANIED ME TO THE HUDAK'S TIME CHAMBER--FOR I HAD FORMULATED A DARING PLAN!"
I THOUGHT YOU'D COME HERE, RAL!
STAND ASIDE, SKAG!
YOUNG FOOL! FOR YOUR OWN GOOD, I'VE THROWN THE OTHERS OFF YOUR TRAIL! SURRENDER TO ME--AND I'LL SEE YOU GO UNPUNISHED FOR YOUR DEED!
IT'S SUICIDE TO ATTEMPT WHAT YOU'RE THINKING--TO GO THROUGH THE TIME PORTAL WITHOUT A DRAGON TO GUIDE YOU!
I'LL DARE IT! AND I'LL FIND A DRAGON!
"SOMEHOW, SKAGERACKRÄKOR KNEW WHAT MY PLAN WAS, AND WAS DETERMINED TO STOP ME! WE FOUGHT, AND IN THE BATTLE I WOUNDED HIM GRIEVOUSLY!"
YOU'LL NEVER GET AWAY WITH IT, RAL! YOU'LL BE HUNTED...
"IT WAS SELF DEFENSE, BUT NO ONE WOULD EVER BELIEVE AN ACCUSED MURDERER!! AT ANY RATE, I WAS BOUND TO MY SCHEME...
"WE BREACHED THE TIME PORTAL!
"A DRAGON HAS AN INNATE SENSE OF TEMPORAL DIRECTION, ALLOWING A RIDER TO SAFELY TRAVERSE THE CURRENTS OF TIME! WITHOUT IT, THE TRIP IS DANGEROUS, POSSIBLY FATAL!
"BUT I HAD CALCULATED OUR ROUTE CAREFULLY...
"BUFFETED AND BRUISED, LALIQUE AND I DID THE IMPOSSIBLE--MADE IT TO EARTH...THIS CENTURY... ONLY TO BE FOLLOWED!
"THE RIDERS HAD GUESSED THAT I'D HEAD FOR THE WORLD OF MY FATHER'S BIRTH!

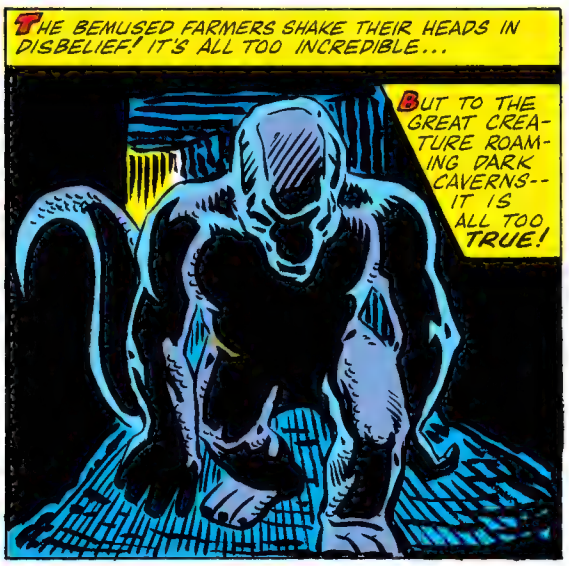

LALIQUE ACTED AS A DECOY, WHILE I SEARCHED FOR THE ONE CREATURE WHO COULD SERVE ME--
--FOR, THROUGH MY EARTH STUDIES, I KNEW THERE EXISTED AN ARTIFICIAL BEAST WITH THE UNIQUE CHARACTERISTICS OF A TRUE DRAGON OF RAMMATPOLEN!
YOU KNOW HIM AS-- DRAGON MAN!
HA!
AND SINCE DRAGON MAN ORIGINALLY APPEARED AT OUR OLD COLLEGE, THAT WAS YOUR DESTINATION!
BUT YOU MUST HAVE MISCALCULATED, ARRIVED A FEW YEARS LATER THAN YOU WANTED...AND STUMBLED ON BEN'S REUNION, INSTEAD!
YES-- I MISSED MY MARK BY A FEW YEARS.
SO--THE RIDERS SHOT YA, HUH? AND LALIQUE HEALED YA UP?
C'MON, BEN! YOU SOUND LIKE YOU BELIEVE HIS CORNBALL STORY!
YOU MUST!
SO WHAT HAPPENED TO TURN LALIQUE AGAINST YA?
"SHE CAME TO ME IN THE HOSPITAL, IN DISGUISE, TO MINISTER TO ME. HEALING IS HER SPECIAL TALENT, EVEN AS MINE IS TIME DIVINATION!
"BUT SHE ONCE AGAIN TRIED TO TALK ME INTO ADMITTING GUILT FOR THE SLAYING OF THE DRAGONS!
"I LASHED OUT IN MY ANGER! IF SHE COULDN'T HAVE TOTAL FAITH IN MY INNOCENCE, I WANTED NO PART OF HER!
"THUS ABANDONED ON A HOSTILE ALIEN WORLD, SHE HAD NO CHOICE BUT TO RETURN TO THE RIDERS! LALIQUE IS NOW CONVINCED THAT I'VE LOST MY SENSES AND NEED REHABILITATION!"
SO YA CAME TO US, HUH...AND BROUGHT YER TROUBLES ALONG?
THEY'RE NOT JUST MY PROBLEMS, MR. GRIMM...
YOU SEE, AS A HUMAN, MY PRIMARY INTEREST WOULD HAVE BEEN PROTECTING YOUR WORLD--THE ENTIRE TIME SEQUENCE OF HUMAN HISTORY!
NOT ONLY THAT--BUT I FEEL THAT SKAG IS MAD! THERE'S NO TELLING WHAT DAMAGE HE MIGHT EVENTUALLY DO TO RATIONAL, CIVILIZED WORLDS THROUGHOUT THE TIME/SPACE CONTINUUM!
SO, FIRST YOU SHOW US THE CARROT--AND NOW HERE'S THE STICK! WHY SHOULD WE BUY IT?
WE CAN HARDLY IGNORE HIS STORY, LITTLE BROTHER!
SUE IS RIGHT! WE MUST GET TO THE BOTTOM OF THIS, ONE WAY OR ANOTHER--AND I'M INCLINED TO AGREE WITH BEN...
THEN IT'S UNANIMOUS, RIGHT, JOHNNY?
AW, WHAT THE HECK!


MEANWHILE, ON A SMALL FARM IN PENNSYLVANIA MINING COUNTRY...
IT'S UN-BELIEVABLE, RUSS! THERE WAS A FLASH OF LIGHT, AND BY THE TIME I GOT TO THE GRAIN SILO--IT WAS GONE!
NEVER SAW ANY-THING LIKE IT IN ALL MY BORN DAYS!

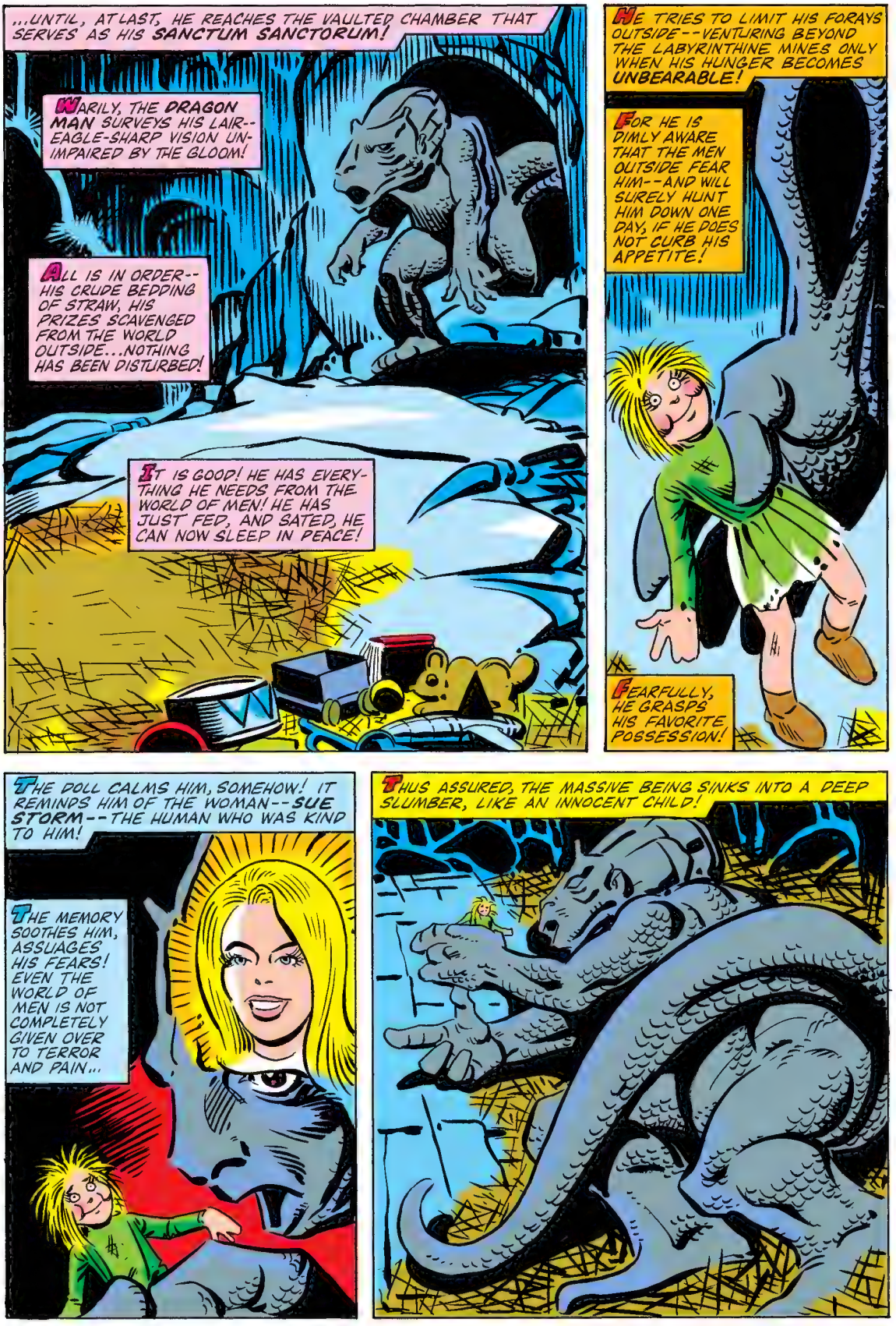

I HAVE, DWIGHT! I ADMIT--I WAS AMAZED, TOO, THE FIRST TIME!
FOUR GRAIN SILOES--IN THIS COUNTY ALONE! --HAVE BEEN HIT BY MYSTERIOUS FIRES!

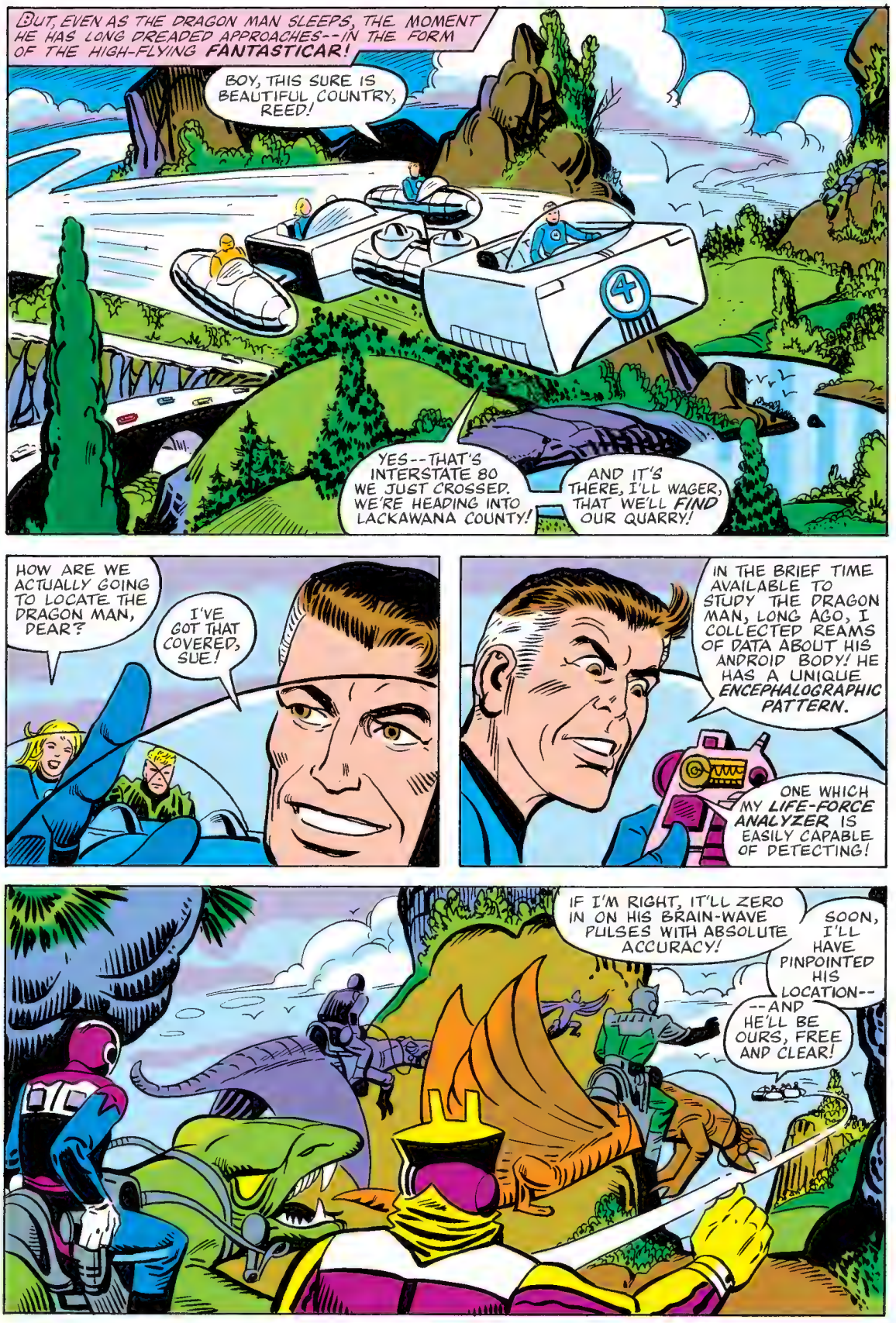
YEAH! I HEARD ABOUT THAT! I'VE ALSO HEARD STORIES ABOUT SOME KINDA HUGE FLYING CREATURE!


"FOLKS SAY THEY'RE SURE IT LIVES IN THE OLD ABANDONED MINESHAFTS UP IN THE HILLS...
"THEY SAY IT SOMETIMES COMES OUT AT NIGHT TO EAT--! ME--I THINK IT'S HOGWASH!"

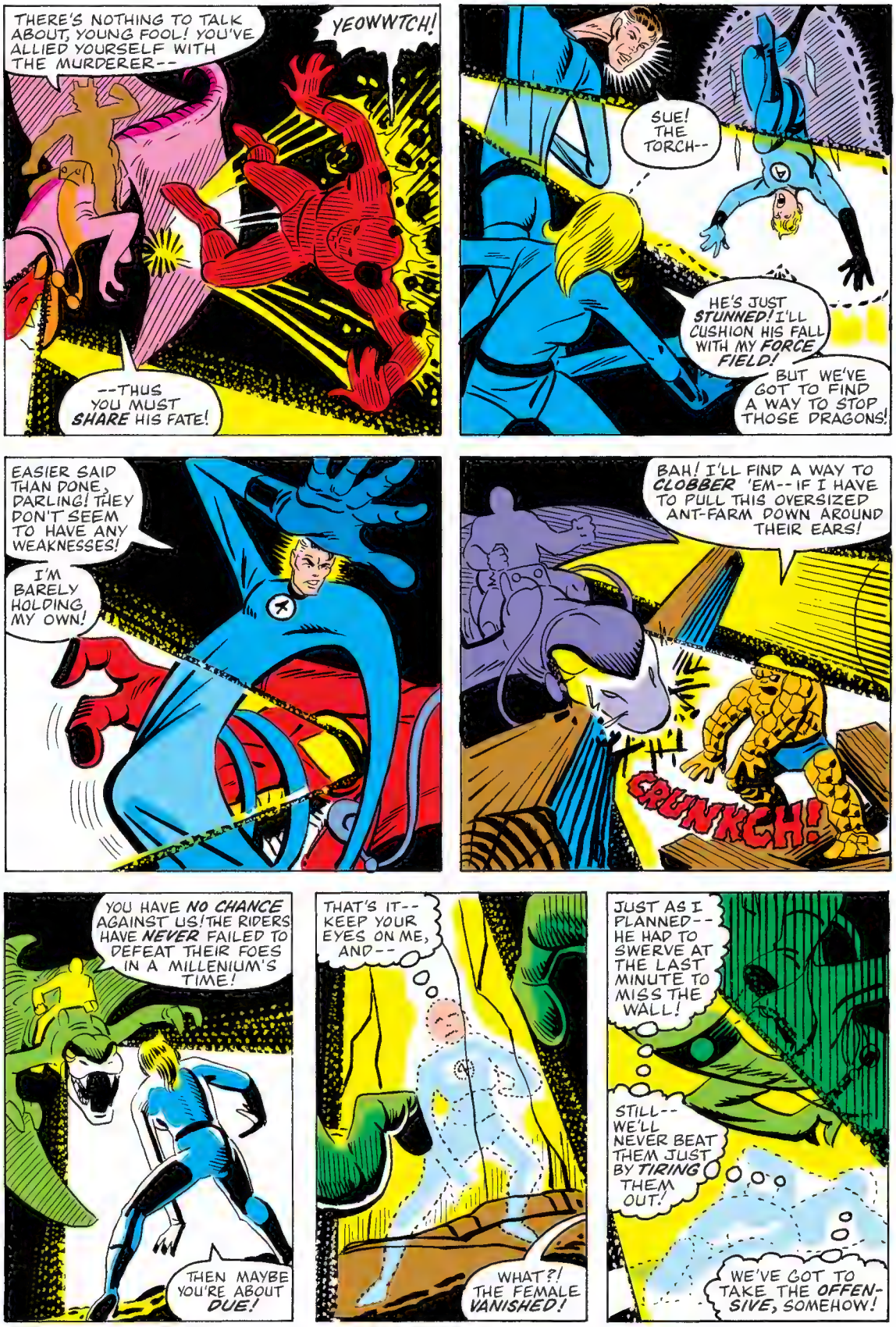

THE BEMUSED FARMERS SHAKE THEIR HEADS IN DISBELIEF! IT'S ALL TOO INCREDIBLE...
BUT TO THE GREAT CREA-TURE ROAM-ING DARK CAVERNS--IT IS ALL TOO TRUE!

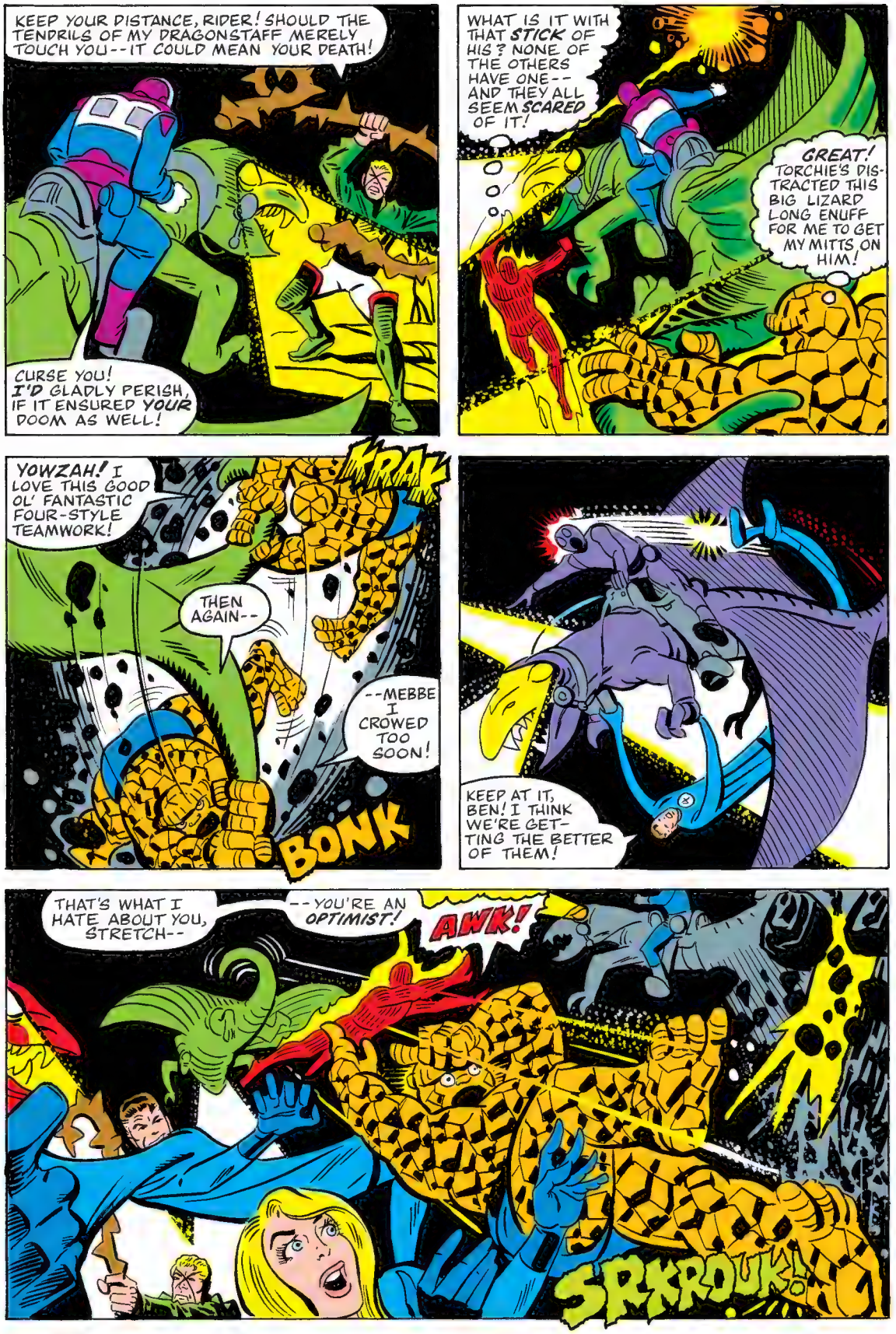
RETURNING FROM HIS MOST RECENT FORAY INTO THE WORLD OF MEN, THE MASSIVE BEAST PLODS LABORIOUSLY THROUGH THE TWISTING MINE TUNNELS...

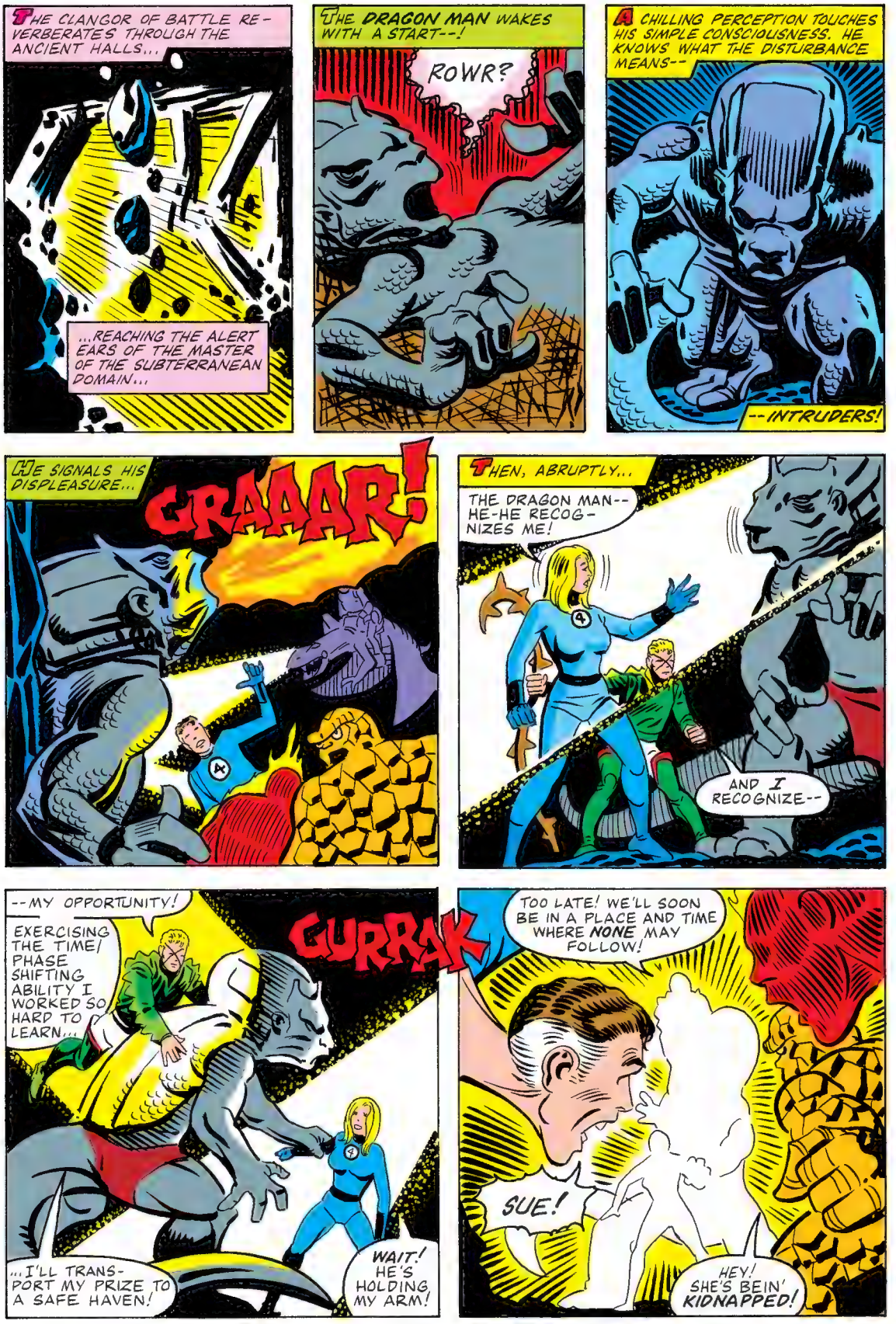

...UNTIL, AT LAST, HE REACHES THE VAULTED CHAMBER THAT SERVES AS HIS SANCTUM SANCTORUM!
WARILY, THE DRAGON MAN SURVEYS HIS LAIR--EAGLE-SHARP VISION UNIMPAIRED BY THE GLOOM!
ALL IS IN ORDER--HIS CRUDE BEDDING OF STRAW, HIS PRIZES SCAVENGED FROM THE WORLD OUTSIDE...NOTHING HAS BEEN DISTURBED!
IT IS GOOD! HE HAS EVERYTHING HE NEEDS FROM THE WORLD OF MEN! HE HAS JUST FED, AND SATED, HE CAN NOW SLEEP IN PEACE!
HE TRIES TO LIMIT HIS FORAYS OUTSIDE--VENTURING BEYOND THE LABYRINTHINE MINES ONLY WHEN HIS HUNGER BECOMES UNBEARABLE!
FOR HE IS DIMLY AWARE THAT THE MEN OUTSIDE FEAR HIM--AND WILL SURELY HUNT HIM DOWN ONE DAY, IF HE DOES NOT CURB HIS APPETITE!
FEARFULLY, HE GRASPS HIS FAVORITE POSSESSION!
THE DOLL CALMS HIM, SOMEHOW! IT REMINDS HIM OF THE WOMAN--SUE STORM--THE HUMAN WHO WAS KIND TO HIM!
THE MEMORY SOOTHES HIM, ASSUAGES HIS FEARS! EVEN THE WORLD OF MEN IS NOT COMPLETELY GIVEN OVER TO TERROR AND PAIN...
THUS ASSURED, THE MASSIVE BEING SINKS INTO A DEEP SLUMBER, LIKE AN INNOCENT CHILD!


BUT, EVEN AS THE DRAGON MAN SLEEPS, THE MOMENT HE HAS LONG DREADED APPROACHES--IN THE FORM OF THE HIGH-FLYING FANTASTICAR!
BOY, THIS SURE IS BEAUTIFUL COUNTRY, REED!
YES--THAT'S INTERSTATE 80 WE JUST CROSSED. WE'RE HEADING INTO LACKAWANA COUNTY!
AND IT'S THERE, I'LL WAGER, THAT WE'LL FIND OUR QUARRY!
HOW ARE WE ACTUALLY GOING TO LOCATE THE DRAGON MAN, DEAR?
I'VE GOT THAT COVERED, SUE!
IN THE BRIEF TIME AVAILABLE TO STUDY THE DRAGON MAN, LONG AGO, I COLLECTED REAMS OF DATA ABOUT HIS ANDROID BODY! HE HAS A UNIQUE ENCEPHALOGRAPHIC PATTERN.
ONE WHICH MY LIFE-FORCE ANALYZER IS EASILY CAPABLE OF DETECTING!
IF I'M RIGHT, IT'LL ZERO IN ON HIS BRAIN-WAVE PULSES WITH ABSOLUTE ACCURACY!
SOON, I'LL HAVE PINPOINTED HIS LOCATION--
--AND HE'LL BE OURS, FREE AND CLEAR!

SOON...
HANG ON, TROOPS! ACCORDING TO THE ANALYZER--THIS OLD MINE-SHAFT IS THE DRAGON MAN'S PRESENT LOCATION!
SHEESH! WHERE'S HIS BLAMED WELCOME MAT?!
I'LL FLY AHEAD AND LIGHT A PATH THROUGH THESE PITCH BLACK TUNNELS!
CAREFUL, JOHNNY! YOUR FLAME COULD IGNITE ANY COAL LEFT IN THIS MINE!
C'MON, LEADER MAN! YOU KNOW I CAN CONTROL MY FLAME TO A T!
CAREFULLY, BROTHERS!
UH-OH! LOOKS LIKE WE'VE COMPANY!
YEAH--EITHER THAT, OR ELSE THEY'RE RERUNNIN' CLOSE ENCOUNTERS ON DRAGON MAN'S TV!
THE RIDERS!
STAND ASIDE, OR SUFFER THE CONSEQUENCES, EARTHLINGS! WE'VE COME TO TAKE CUSTODY OF THE CRIMINAL, RAL DORN!
I THINK THEY'D RATHER FIGHT THAN TALK, GANG!
I JUST HOPE YOU'RE RIGHT ABOUT WHICH SIDE WE'RE ON!

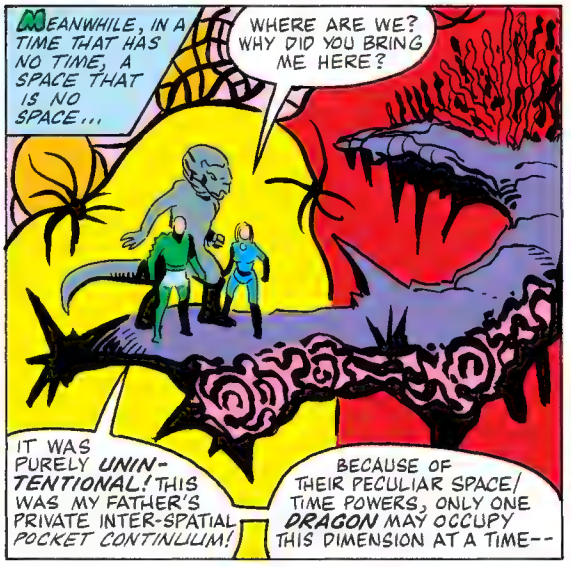

THERE'S NOTHING TO TALK ABOUT, YOUNG FOOL! YOU'VE ALLIED YOURSELF WITH THE MURDERER--
YEOWWTCH!
--THUS YOU MUST SHARE HIS FATE!
SUE! THE TORCH--
HE'S JUST STUNNED! I'LL CUSHION HIS FALL WITH MY FORCE FIELD!
BUT WE'VE GOT TO FIND A WAY TO STOP THOSE DRAGONS!
EASIER SAID THAN DONE, DARLING! THEY DON'T SEEM TO HAVE ANY WEAKNESSES!
I'M BARELY HOLDING MY OWN!
BAH! I'LL FIND A WAY TO CLOBBER 'EM-- IF I HAVE TO PULL THIS OVERSIZED ANT-FARM DOWN AROUND THEIR EARS!
CRUNKCH!
YOU HAVE NO CHANCE AGAINST US! THE RIDERS HAVE NEVER FAILED TO DEFEAT THEIR FOES IN A MILLENIUM'S TIME!
THEN MAYBE YOU'RE ABOUT DUE!
THAT'S IT-- KEEP YOUR EYES ON ME, AND--
WHAT?! THE FEMALE VANISHED!
JUST AS I PLANNED-- HE HAD TO SWERVE AT THE LAST MINUTE TO MISS THE WALL!
STILL-- WE'LL NEVER BEAT THEM JUST BY TIRING THEM OUT!
WE'VE GOT TO TAKE THE OFFENSIVE, SOMEHOW!

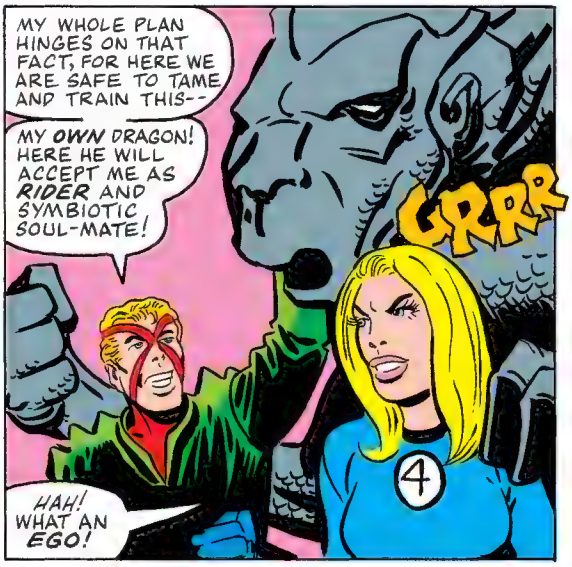

KEEP YOUR DISTANCE, RIDER! SHOULD THE TENDRILS OF MY DRAGONSTAFF MERELY TOUCH YOU--IT COULD MEAN YOUR DEATH!
CURSE YOU! I'D GLADLY PERISH, IF IT ENSURED YOUR DOOM AS WELL!
WHAT IS IT WITH THAT STICK OF HIS? NONE OF THE OTHERS HAVE ONE-- AND THEY ALL SEEM SCARED OF IT!
GREAT! TORCHIE'S DISTRACTED THIS BIG LIZARD LONG ENUFF FOR ME TO GET MY MITTS ON HIM!
YOWZAH! I LOVE THIS GOOD OL' FANTASTIC FOUR-STYLE TEAMWORK!
KRAK
THEN AGAIN--
--MEBBE I CROWED TOO SOON!
BONK
KEEP AT IT, BEN! I THINK WE'RE GETTING THE BETTER OF THEM!
THAT'S WHAT I HATE ABOUT YOU, STRETCH--
--YOU'RE AN OPTIMIST!
AWK!
SRKROUK!

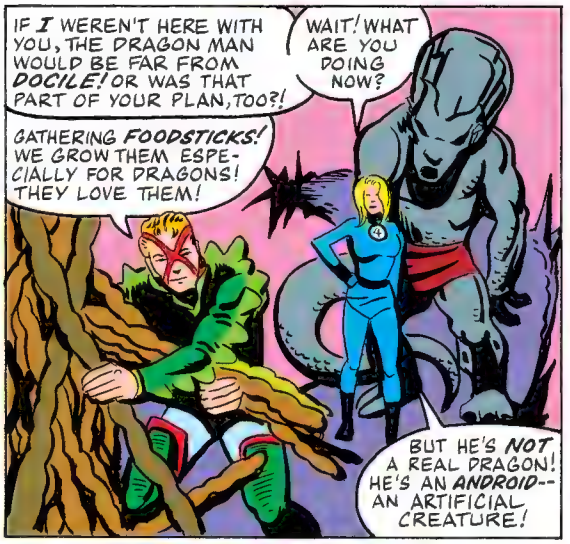

THE CLANGOR OF BATTLE REVERBERATES THROUGH THE ANCIENT HALLS...
...REACHING THE ALERT EARS OF THE MASTER OF THE SUBTERRANEAN DOMAIN...
THE DRAGON MAN WAKES WITH A START--!
ROWR?
A CHILLING PERCEPTION TOUCHES HIS SIMPLE CONSCIOUSNESS. HE KNOWS WHAT THE DISTURBANCE MEANS--
--INTRUDERS!
HE SIGNALS HIS DISPLEASURE...
GRAAAR!
THEN, ABRUPTLY...
THE DRAGON MAN--HE-HE RECOGNIZES ME!
AND I RECOGNIZE--
--MY OPPORTUNITY!
EXERCISING THE TIME/PHASE SHIFTING ABILITY I WORKED SO HARD TO LEARN...
GURRAK
...I'LL TRANSPORT MY PRIZE TO A SAFE HAVEN!
WAIT! HE'S HOLDING MY ARM!
TOO LATE! WE'LL SOON BE IN A PLACE AND TIME WHERE NONE MAY FOLLOW!
SUE!
HEY! SHE'S BEIN' KIDNAPPED!

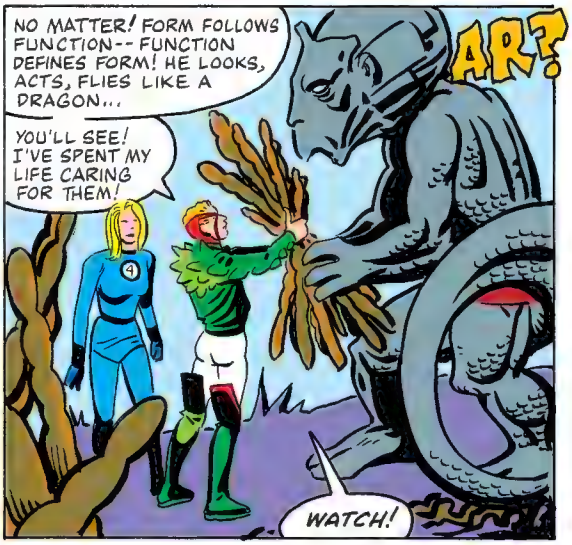
NOW WADDA WE--
HOLD! IN LIGHT OF WHAT HAS JUST OCCURRED, I PROPOSE A TRUCE!
IT'S LALIQUE! SHE'S REALLY PICKED UP THE LANGUAGE!
BUT WHY WOULD SHE PROPOSE A TRUCE, UNLESS...
HERE IS WHY: WE CANNOT FOLLOW RAL TO CAPTURE HIM--ANY MORE THAN YOU CAN FIND HIM TO RESCUE THE FEMALE! HE HAS FLED TO A DIMENSIONAL CUL-DE-SAC!
BUT HE MUST COME OUT EVENTUALLY! MAYBE THEN YOU EARTHLINGS CAN HELP US BRING HIM TO REASON!
WHY SHOULD WE MAKE TREATY WITH THESE?! THEY GAVE AID TO THE MURDERER!
NUTS TA YOU, PAL!
BEN--LET'S HEAR WHAT LALIQUE HAS TO SAY! SHE'S A FRIEND OF RAL'S...
YES--AND I'M STILL NOT CONVINCED THAT HE SLAUGHTERED THE YOUNGLINGS! I WANT TO SEE HIM GET A FAIR TRIAL!
SUCH WAS HIS RIGHT BEFORE HE FLED!
BUT RAL TOLD US HE WAS SURE THAT YOUR LEADER HAD GONE MAD! MAYBE HE IS AFRAID HE WON'T GET A FAIR HEARING!
AND, FOR ALL WE KNOW, HE'S RIGHT!
WHAT WE NEED IS PROOF!
YOU DARE SUGGEST OUR DRAGON LORD HAS GONE MAD?! SUCH A THOUGHT IS BLASPHEMY!
STILL--THE STRETCHING ONE IS CLEARLY A RATIONAL BEING! WE CANNOT DISMISS HIS WORD--THROUGH BLIND ADHERENCE TO DOGMA!
YEESH! THEY'RE ACTIN' LIKE A BLAMED DEBATIN' TEAM--WHILE SUZIE'S LIFE'S IN DANGER!
IF IT WILL CONVINCE YOU TO AID OUR CAUSE--WE WILL SUBMIT TO A TEST OF YOUR OWN DEVISING.
AGREED.
I DON'T LIKE IT! I'M GONNA KEEP AN EYE ON 'EM--NO MATTER WHAT!

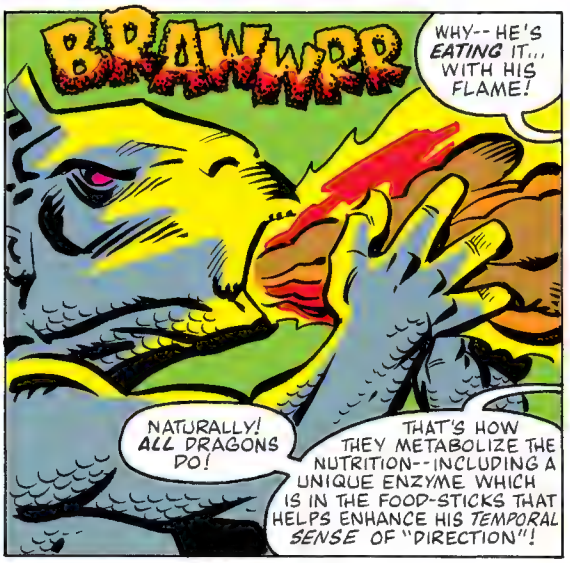
THE SHAKY TRUCE ENDURES A TRIP BACK TO THE BAXTER BUILDING, WHERE...
THE DEVICE I'M GOING TO USE IS BASED ON THE SAME PRINCIPLE AS THE MORE MUNDANE POLYGRAPH...
C'MON, REED, SPIT IT OUT--
--IT'S A SOUPED-UP LIE DETECTOR, RIGHT?
YES, JOHNNY--BUT IT'S SOPHISTICATED ENOUGH TO WORK ON ALMOST ANY METABOLISM...
...HUMAN OR ALIEN!
WE ARE READY! PROCEED!
AND, SO...
WELL, WHAT'S THE POOP?!
I'M NOT SURE! THESE ARE HARDLY THE READINGS I'D EXPECTED!
DOES THAT MEAN THEY'RE LIARS, OR WHAT?!
THAT'S WHAT I'M TRYING TO TELL YOU...
...EVEN WITH THE POWERFUL HYPNO-RYTHMS I'VE EMPLOYED, THE RESULTS ARE... WELL... AMAZING! THE DRAGON RIDERS ACTUALLY SEEM TO BE INCAPABLE OF MALICIOUS DECEIT! IT SEEMS TO BE A SIDE-EFFECT OF THEIR SYMBIOSIS WITH THE DRAGONS!
WHAT?! THEN-- THEN...
I KNEW IT ALL ALONG! THAT RAL DORN CHARACTER IS A CON-ARTIST!
NOW WAIT! DON'T JUMP TO CON-CLUSIONS!
YA DON'T SUPPOSE YER DING-BUSTED MACHINE COULD BE WRONG, DO YOU?
NO, BEN! EVEN THOUGH YOU LIKED RAL DORN--WE'VE GOT TO FACE FACTS! HE'S GOT MY WIFE!
I READ YA, STRETCHO!
WE MADE A DEAL WITH THE RIDERS--
LET'S GET CRACKIN'!

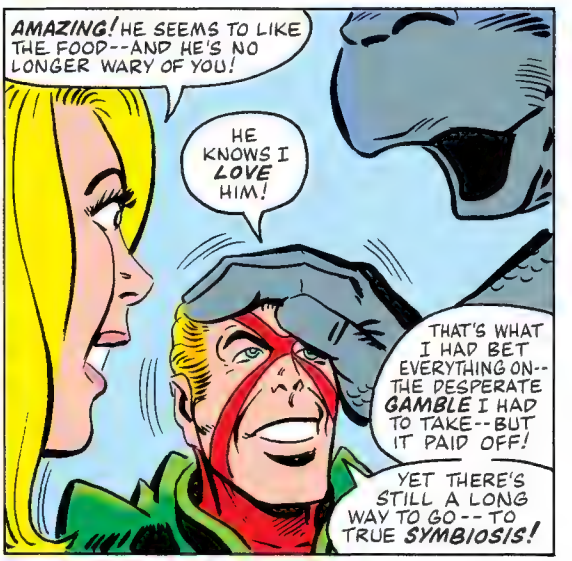

MEANWHILE, IN A TIME THAT HAS NO TIME, A SPACE THAT IS NO SPACE...
WHERE ARE WE? WHY DID YOU BRING ME HERE?
IT WAS PURELY UNINTENTIONAL! THIS WAS MY FATHER'S PRIVATE INTER-SPATIAL POCKET CONTINUUM!
BECAUSE OF THEIR PECULIAR SPACE/TIME POWERS, ONLY ONE DRAGON MAY OCCUPY THIS DIMENSION AT A TIME--

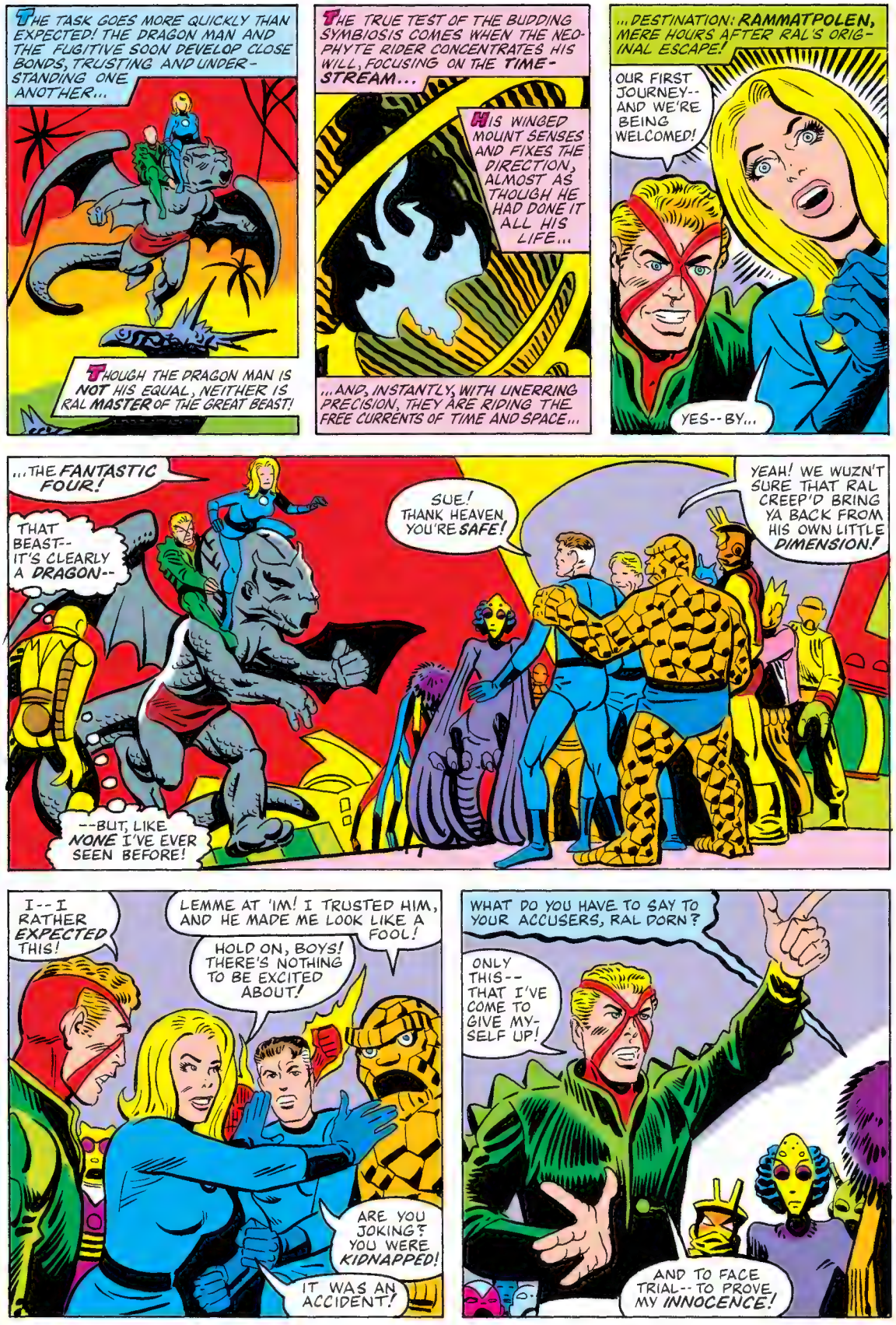

MY WHOLE PLAN HINGES ON THAT FACT, FOR HERE WE ARE SAFE TO TAME AND TRAIN THIS--
MY OWN DRAGON! HERE HE WILL ACCEPT ME AS RIDER AND SYMBIOTIC SOUL-MATE!
GRRR
HAH! WHAT AN EGO!


IF I WEREN'T HERE WITH YOU, THE DRAGON MAN WOULD BE FAR FROM DOCILE! OR WAS THAT PART OF YOUR PLAN, TOO?!
WAIT! WHAT ARE YOU DOING NOW?
GATHERING FOODSTICKS! WE GROW THEM ESPECIALLY FOR DRAGONS! THEY LOVE THEM!
BUT HE'S NOT A REAL DRAGON! HE'S AN ANDROID--AN ARTIFICIAL CREATURE!

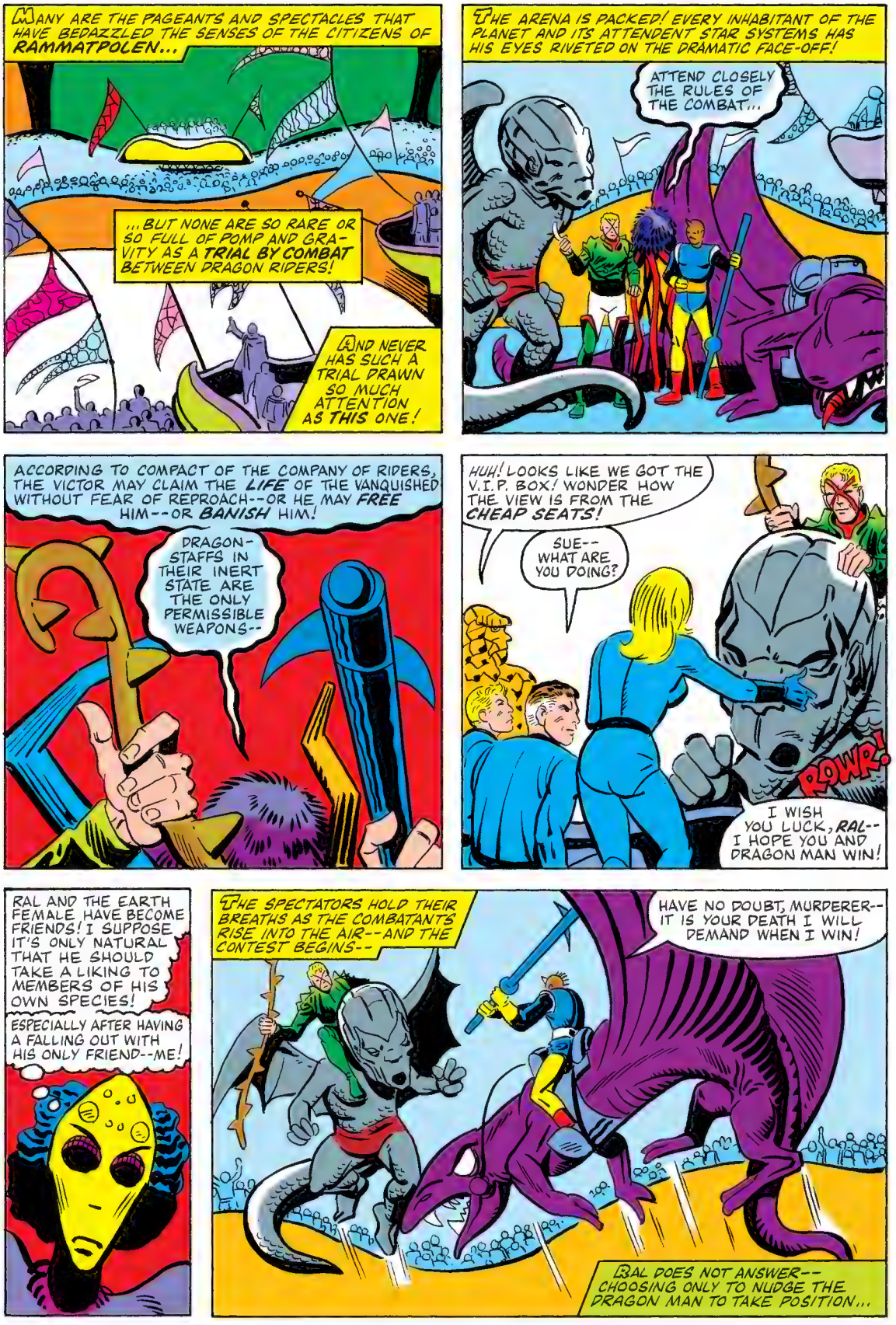

NO MATTER! FORM FOLLOWS FUNCTION-- FUNCTION DEFINES FORM! HE LOOKS, ACTS, FLIES LIKE A DRAGON...
ART?
YOU'LL SEE! I'VE SPENT MY LIFE CARING FOR THEM!
WATCH!

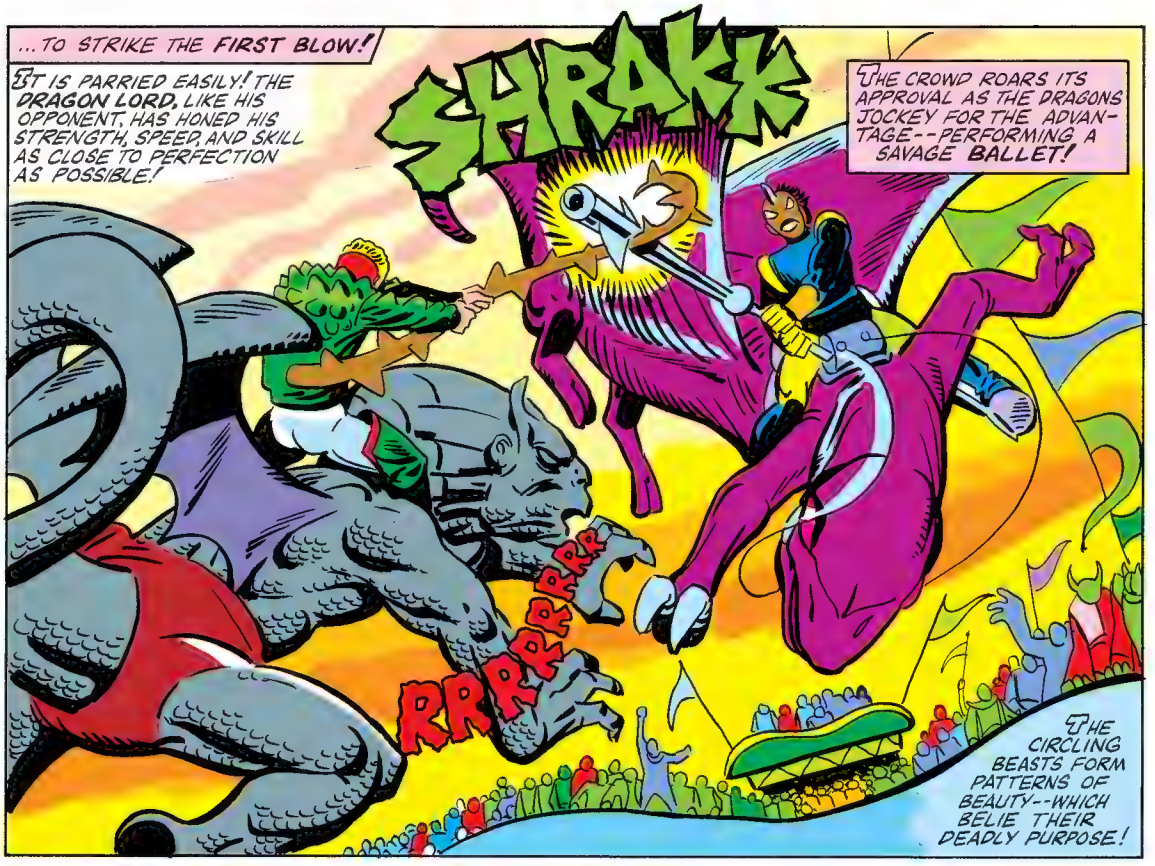

BRAWRR
WHY--HE'S EATING IT... WITH HIS FLAME!
NATURALLY! ALL DRAGONS DO!
THAT'S HOW THEY METABOLIZE THE NUTRITION--INCLUDING A UNIQUE ENZYME WHICH IS IN THE FOOD-STICKS THAT HELPS ENHANCE HIS TEMPORAL SENSE OF "DIRECTION"!


AMAZING! HE SEEMS TO LIKE THE FOOD--AND HE'S NO LONGER WARY OF YOU!
HE KNOWS I LOVE HIM!
THAT'S WHAT I HAD BET EVERYTHING ON--THE DESPERATE GAMBLE I HAD TO TAKE--BUT IT PAID OFF!
YET THERE'S STILL A LONG WAY TO GO--TO TRUE SYMBIOSIS!


THE TASK GOES MORE QUICKLY THAN EXPECTED! THE DRAGON MAN AND THE FUGITIVE SOON DEVELOP CLOSE BONDS, TRUSTING AND UNDERSTANDING ONE ANOTHER...
THOUGH THE DRAGON MAN IS NOT HIS EQUAL, NEITHER IS RAL MASTER OF THE GREAT BEAST!
THE TRUE TEST OF THE BUDDING SYMBIOSIS COMES WHEN THE NEOPHYTE RIDER CONCENTRATES HIS WILL, FOCUSING ON THE TIME-STREAM...
HIS WINGED MOUNT SENSES AND FIXES THE DIRECTION, ALMOST AS THOUGH HE HAD DONE IT ALL HIS LIFE...
...AND, INSTANTLY, WITH UNERRING PRECISION, THEY ARE RIDING THE FREE CURRENTS OF TIME AND SPACE...
...DESTINATION: RAMMATPOLEN, MERE HOURS AFTER RAL'S ORIGINAL ESCAPE!
OUR FIRST JOURNEY-- AND WE'RE BEING WELCOMED!
YES-- BY...
...THE FANTASTIC FOUR!
THAT BEAST-- IT'S CLEARLY A DRAGON--
--BUT, LIKE NONE I'VE EVER SEEN BEFORE!
SUE! THANK HEAVEN YOU'RE SAFE!
YEAH! WE WUZN'T SURE THAT RAL CREEP'D BRING YA BACK FROM HIS OWN LITTLE DIMENSION!
I--I RATHER EXPECTED THIS!
LEMME AT 'IM! I TRUSTED HIM, AND HE MADE ME LOOK LIKE A FOOL!
HOLD ON, BOYS! THERE'S NOTHING TO BE EXCITED ABOUT!
ARE YOU JOKING? YOU WERE KIDNAPPED!
IT WAS AN ACCIDENT!
WHAT DO YOU HAVE TO SAY TO YOUR ACCUSERS, RAL DORN?
ONLY THIS-- THAT I'VE COME TO GIVE MYSELF UP!
AND TO FACE TRIAL-- TO PROVE MY INNOCENCE!

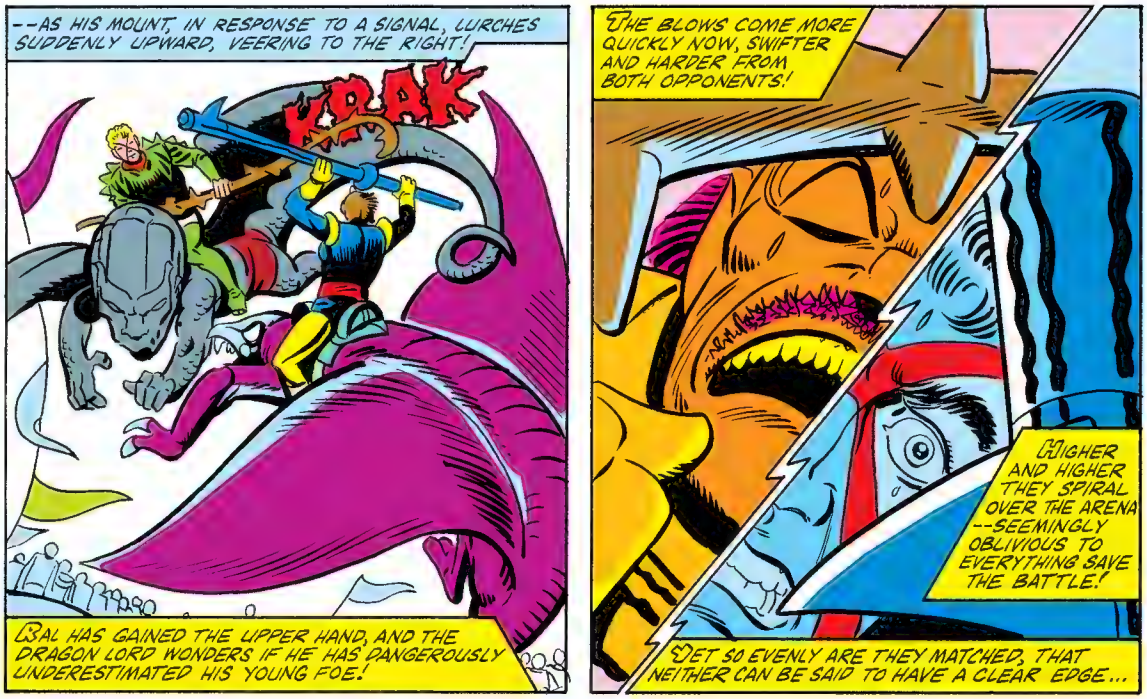
NO COURT IN RAMMATPOLEN WILL EVER AQUIT YOU, VILLAIN! THE EVIDENCE LAYS HEAVILY AGAINST YOU!
SKAGERACKRÄKOR!
YOU, SCUM, MAY ADDRESS ME FORMALLY, AS DRAGON LORD!
I ACCUSE YOU NOT ONLY OF SLAUGHTERING THE YOUNG DRAGONS-- BUT OF THE SUPREME EVIL...
...THE INITIATION OF VIOLENCE AGAINST A FELLOW BEING!
ACCUSE WHAT YOU WISH, DRAGON LORD! I'LL STAND TRIAL ACCORDING TO THE LAW--
--THE LAW OF THE RIDERS! NOW THAT I HAVE A DRAGON, I AM ONE OF YOU!
THE GATHERED CROWD GASPS WITH ASTONISHMENT AT THE AUDACIOUS STATEMENT! SURELY THE YOUNGSTER IS AS INSANE AS THE RIDERS CLAIM!
NEVER!
YOU, THE MOST DESPICABLE--
HOLD, SKAG! THE YOUTH IS WITHIN HIS RIGHTS!
NO MATTER WHAT ELSE HE HAS DONE--HE IS TRAINED, AND HE RIDES A DRAGON! THAT IS ALL THAT IS REQUIRED!
HE IS ENTITLED TO A TRIAL BY THE RULES OF YOUR ORDER-- A TRIAL BY COMBAT!
SO! MIGHT MAKES RIGHT IN THE LAND OF OBJECTIVE REASON! BAH! IT IS TOTALLY WITHOUT HONOR-- BUT I AGREE!
I'LL FIGHT FOR MY OWN HONOR --IN SPITE OF THE GRAVE WOUND INFLICTED ON ME BY YOUR PRECIOUS STUDENT!
I WILL HEAL THE DRAGON LORD'S WOUND, SO THAT THE COMBAT CAN PROCEED! WILL THAT SATISFY YOUR AMBITION, RAL?
YES!
THEN LET THE FARCE BEGIN!

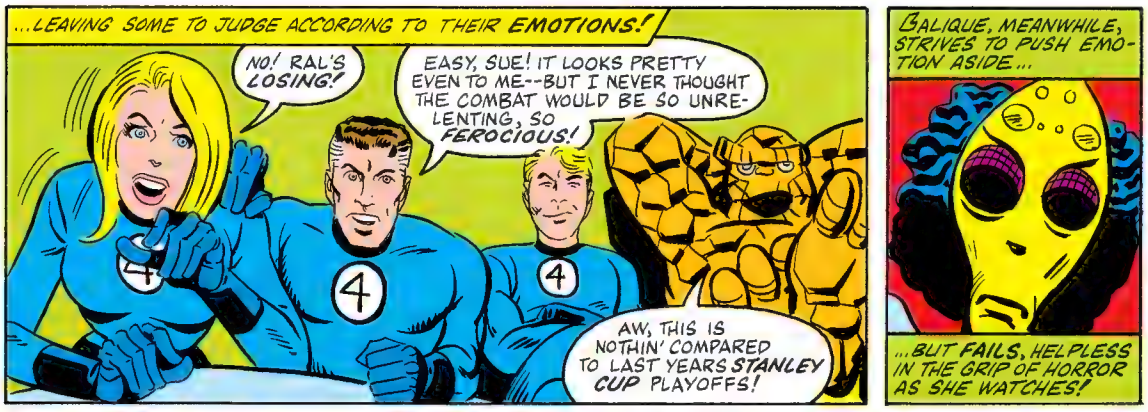

MANY ARE THE PAGEANTS AND SPECTACLES THAT HAVE BEDAZZLED THE SENSES OF THE CITIZENS OF RAMMATPOLEN...
...BUT NONE ARE SO RARE OR SO FULL OF POMP AND GRAVITY AS A TRIAL BY COMBAT BETWEEN DRAGON RIDERS!
AND NEVER HAS SUCH A TRIAL DRAWN SO MUCH ATTENTION AS THIS ONE!
THE ARENA IS PACKED! EVERY INHABITANT OF THE PLANET AND ITS ATTENDENT STAR SYSTEMS HAS HIS EYES RIVETED ON THE DRAMATIC FACE-OFF!
ATTEND CLOSELY THE RULES OF THE COMBAT...
ACCORDING TO COMPACT OF THE COMPANY OF RIDERS, THE VICTOR MAY CLAIM THE LIFE OF THE VANQUISHED WITHOUT FEAR OF REPROACH--OR HE MAY FREE HIM--OR BANISH HIM!
DRAGON-STAFFS IN THEIR INERT STATE ARE THE ONLY PERMISSIBLE WEAPONS--
HUH! LOOKS LIKE WE GOT THE V.I.P. BOX! WONDER HOW THE VIEW IS FROM THE CHEAP SEATS!
SUE--WHAT ARE YOU DOING?
POWR!
I WISH YOU LUCK, RAL--I HOPE YOU AND DRAGON MAN WIN!
RAL AND THE EARTH FEMALE HAVE BECOME FRIENDS! I SUPPOSE IT'S ONLY NATURAL THAT HE SHOULD TAKE A LIKING TO MEMBERS OF HIS OWN SPECIES!
ESPECIALLY AFTER HAVING A FALLING OUT WITH HIS ONLY FRIEND--ME!
THE SPECTATORS HOLD THEIR BREATHS AS THE COMBATANTS RISE INTO THE AIR--AND THE CONTEST BEGINS--
HAVE NO DOUBT, MURDERER--IT IS YOUR DEATH I WILL DEMAND WHEN I WIN!
RAL DOES NOT ANSWER--CHOOSING ONLY TO NUDGE THE DRAGON MAN TO TAKE POSITION...

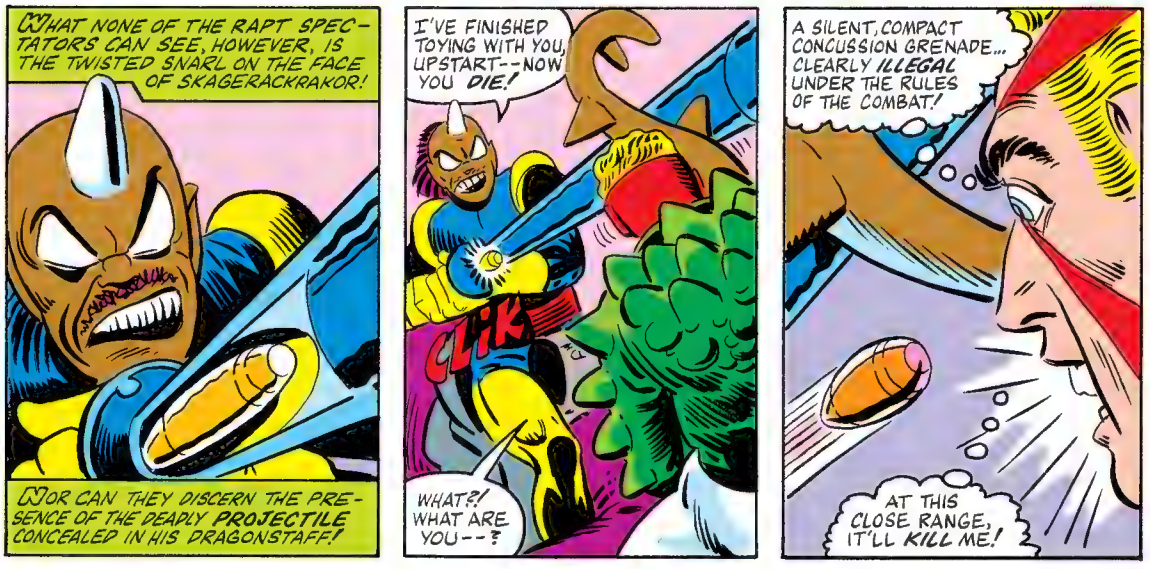

...TO STRIKE THE FIRST BLOW!
IT IS PARRIED EASILY! THE DRAGON LORD, LIKE HIS OPPONENT, HAS HONED HIS STRENGTH, SPEED, AND SKILL AS CLOSE TO PERFECTION AS POSSIBLE!
SHRAKK
THE CROWD ROARS ITS APPROVAL AS THE DRAGONS JOCKEY FOR THE ADVANTAGE--PERFORMING A SAVAGE BALLET!
RRRRRRRRR
THE CIRCLING BEASTS FORM PATTERNS OF BEAUTY--WHICH BELIE THEIR DEADLY PURPOSE!

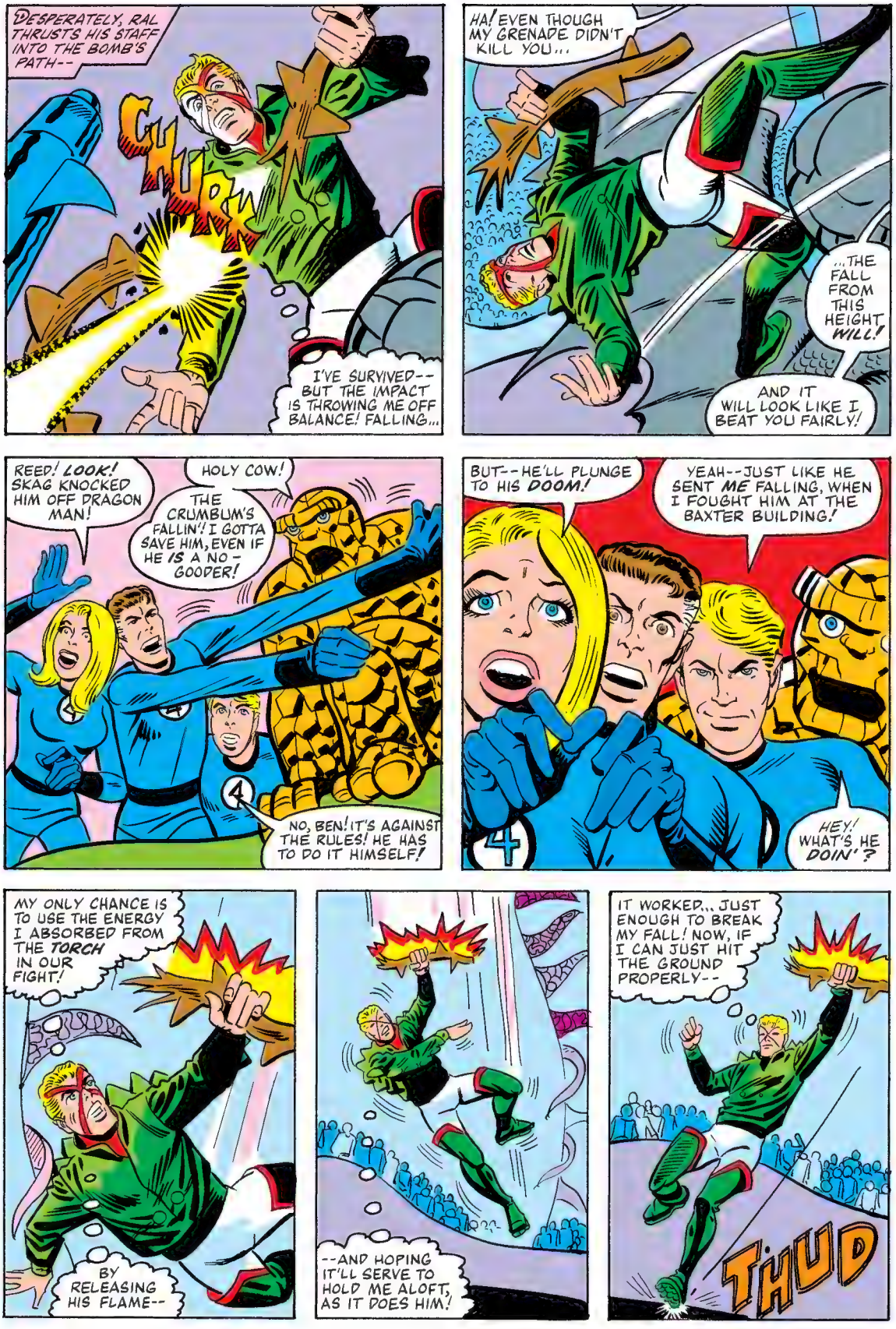
YOU'RE A GOOD FIGHTER, RAL... YOU'D HAVE DONE YOUR FATHER PROUD, IF YOU HADN'T TURNED BAD!
BUT I'VE THE ADVANTAGE OF EXPERIENCE, FROM BATTLING ACROSS THE CENTURIES AND THROUGH THE GALAXIES!
STILL THE YOUNGSTER MAKES NO REPLY, SAVE TO WINCE AT THE OFFHAND MENTION OF HIS FATHER!

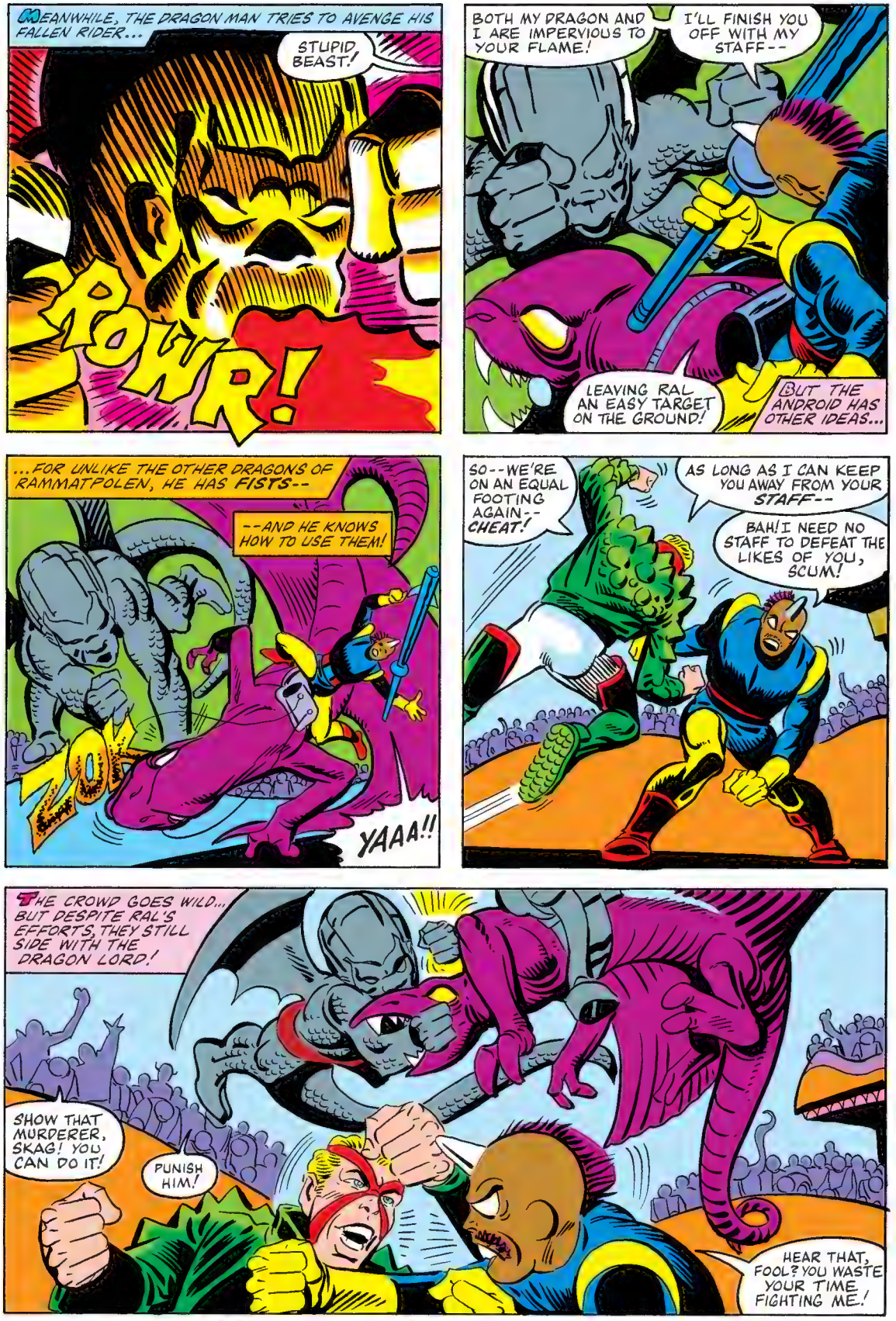
THE PSYCHOLOGICAL PLOY ONLY SERVES TO STIFFEN RAL'S RESOLVE!
COME ON, SCUM--STRIKE!! OR WAS THAT FIRST THRUST TO BE YOUR LAST?!
THE NOVICE RIDER IGNORES THE TAUNT AND CLENCHES HIS TEETH--


--AS HIS MOUNT, IN RESPONSE TO A SIGNAL, LURCHES SUDDENLY UPWARD, VEERING TO THE RIGHT!
KRAK
RAL HAS GAINED THE UPPER HAND, AND THE DRAGON LORD WONDERS IF HE HAS DANGEROUSLY UNDERESTIMATED HIS YOUNG FOE!
THE BLOWS COME MORE QUICKLY NOW, SWIFTER AND HARDER FROM BOTH OPPONENTS!
HIGHER AND HIGHER THEY SPIRAL OVER THE ARENA --SEEMINGLY OBLIVIOUS TO EVERYTHING SAVE THE BATTLE!
YET SO EVENLY ARE THEY MATCHED, THAT NEITHER CAN BE SAID TO HAVE A CLEAR EDGE...

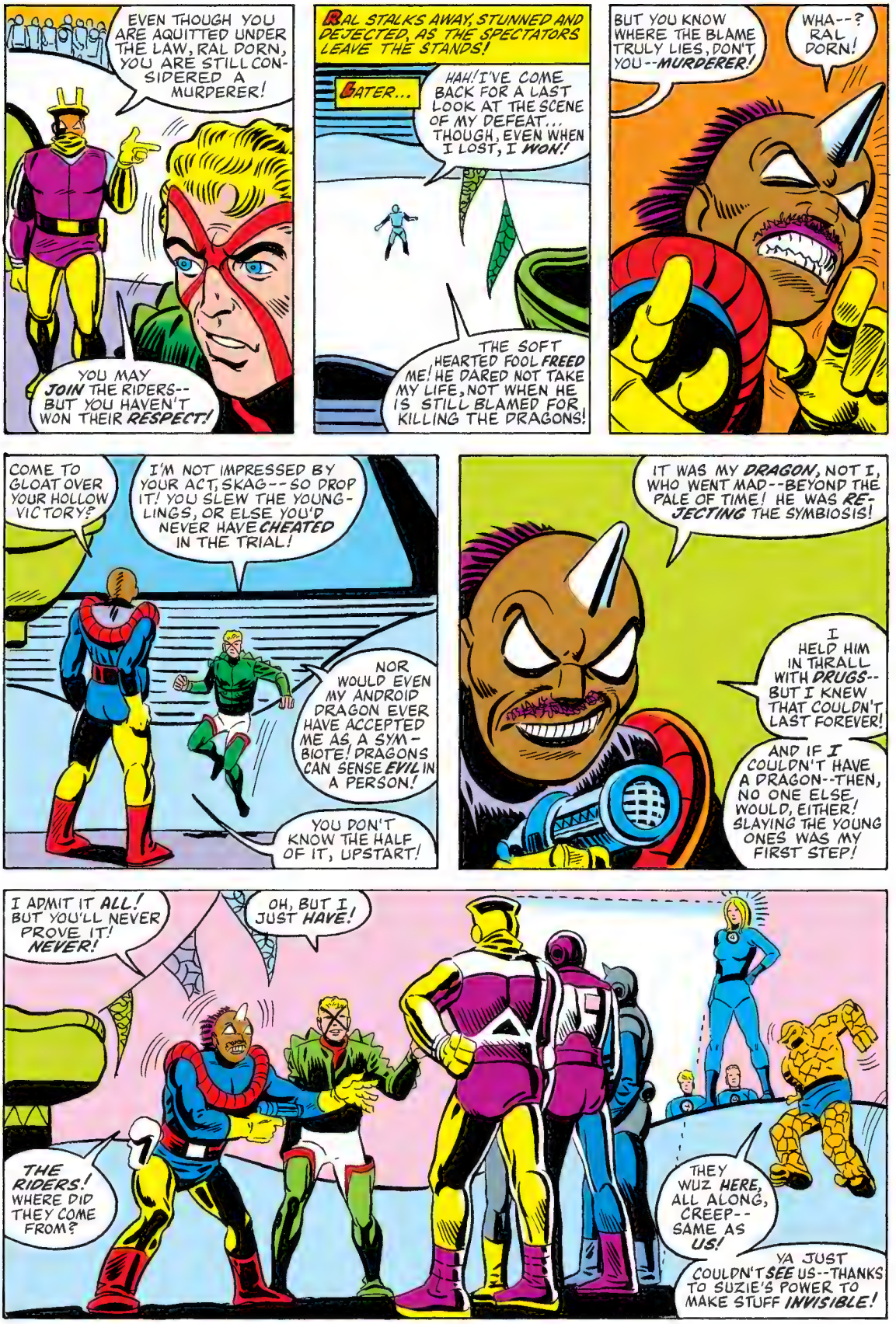

...LEAVING SOME TO JUDGE ACCORDING TO THEIR EMOTIONS!
NO! RAL'S LOSING!
EASY, SUE! IT LOOKS PRETTY EVEN TO ME--BUT I NEVER THOUGHT THE COMBAT WOULD BE SO UNRELENTING, SO FEROCIOUS!
AW, THIS IS NOTHIN' COMPARED TO LAST YEARS STANLEY CUP PLAYOFFS!
GALIQUE, MEANWHILE, STRIVES TO PUSH EMOTION ASIDE...
...BUT FAILS, HELPLESS IN THE GRIP OF HORROR AS SHE WATCHES!


WHAT NONE OF THE RAPT SPECTATORS CAN SEE, HOWEVER, IS THE TWISTED SNARL ON THE FACE OF SKAGERACKRAKOR!
NOR CAN THEY DISCERN THE PRESENCE OF THE DEADLY PROJECTILE CONCEALED IN HIS DRAGONSTAFF!
I'VE FINISHED TOYING WITH YOU, UPSTART--NOW YOU DIE!
CLIK
WHAT?! WHAT ARE YOU--?
A SILENT, COMPACT CONCUSSION GRENADE... CLEARLY ILLEGAL UNDER THE RULES OF THE COMBAT!
AT THIS CLOSE RANGE, IT'LL KILL ME!


DESPERATELY, RAL THRUSTS HIS STAFF INTO THE BOMB'S PATH--
CHURK
I'VE SURVIVED-- BUT THE IMPACT IS THROWING ME OFF BALANCE! FALLING...
HA! EVEN THOUGH MY GRENADE DIDN'T KILL YOU...
...THE FALL FROM THIS HEIGHT WILL!
AND IT WILL LOOK LIKE I BEAT YOU FAIRLY!
REED! LOOK! SKAG KNOCKED HIM OFF DRAGON MAN!
HOLY COW!
THE CRUMBUM'S FALLIN'! I GOTTA SAVE HIM, EVEN IF HE IS A NO-GOODER!
NO, BEN! IT'S AGAINST THE RULES! HE HAS TO DO IT HIMSELF!
BUT--HE'LL PLUNGE TO HIS DOOM!
YEAH--JUST LIKE HE SENT ME FALLING, WHEN I FOUGHT HIM AT THE BAXTER BUILDING!
HEY! WHAT'S HE DOIN'?
MY ONLY CHANCE IS TO USE THE ENERGY I ABSORBED FROM THE TORCH IN OUR FIGHT!
BY RELEASING HIS FLAME--
--AND HOPING IT'LL SERVE TO HOLD ME ALOFT, AS IT DOES HIM!
IT WORKED... JUST ENOUGH TO BREAK MY FALL! NOW, IF I CAN JUST HIT THE GROUND PROPERLY--
THUD


MEANWHILE, THE DRAGON MAN TRIES TO AVENGE HIS FALLEN RIDER...
STUPID BEAST!
ROWR!
BOTH MY DRAGON AND I ARE IMPERVIOUS TO YOUR FLAME!
I'LL FINISH YOU OFF WITH MY STAFF--
LEAVING RAL AN EASY TARGET ON THE GROUND!
BUT THE ANDROID HAS OTHER IDEAS...
...FOR UNLIKE THE OTHER DRAGONS OF RAMMATPOLEN, HE HAS FISTS--
--AND HE KNOWS HOW TO USE THEM!
SHWAP
YAAA!!
SO--WE'RE ON AN EQUAL FOOTING AGAIN-- CHEAT!
AS LONG AS I CAN KEEP YOU AWAY FROM YOUR STAFF--
BAH! I NEED NO STAFF TO DEFEAT THE LIKES OF YOU, SCUM!
THE CROWD GOES WILD... BUT DESPITE RAL'S EFFORTS, THEY STILL SIDE WITH THE DRAGON LORD!
SHOW THAT MURDERER, SKAG! YOU CAN DO IT!
PUNISH HIM!
HEAR THAT, FOOL? YOU WASTE YOUR TIME FIGHTING ME!

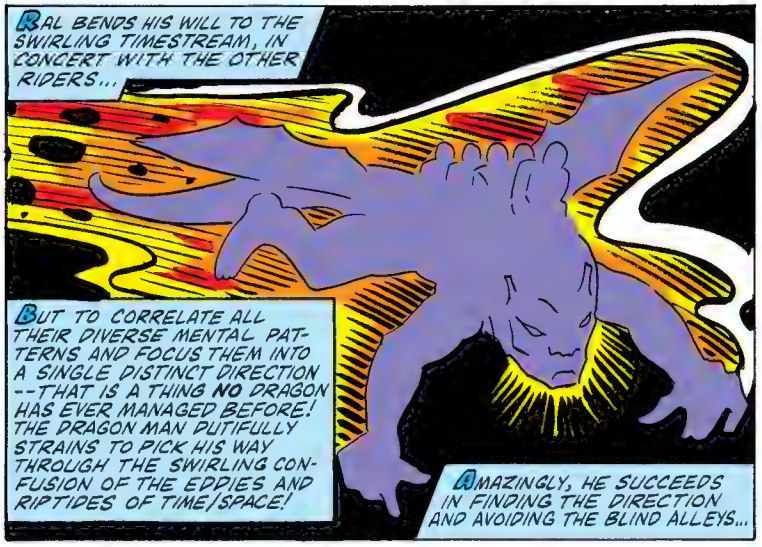
DRAGON MAN BEATS AWAY AT HIS ADVERSARY, USING HIS MASSIVE FISTS IN THE WAY HE'S SEEN THE HUMANS FIGHT...
SHKUD
THE OTHER BEAST RESISTS VALIANTLY...
...BUT THE POUNDING TAKES ITS INEVITABLE TOLL!
BRRRR!!
AND, WHILE THE GRAY BEHEMOTH WARILY EYES HIS STUNNED VICTIM...
...THE RIDERS BATTLE ON, THE ADVANTAGE CLEARLY SHIFTING TO RAL!
WHY DON'T YOU GIVE IT UP?! YOU CAN HEAR THAT CROWD! THEY'RE ALL ON MY SIDE!
IT'S NOT THE CROWD I AM FIGHTING, SKAG!
THAT'S WHAT YOU THINK! EVEN IF YOU WIN, YOU'LL NEVER BE ACCEPTED!
YOU'LL BE SHUNNED--BY CITIZEN AND RIDER ALIKE!
IF I THOUGHT THEY WERE ALL LIKE YOU, SKAG--
SOK
--I'D BE ONLY TOO GLAD TO BE OSTRACISED!
IT'S OVER! SKAG DEFEATED HIMSELF--BY RELYING ON DECEIT, INSTEAD OF HIS OWN SKILL!
GRUR
BUT HE HAD NO CHOICE! HE KNEW HE WAS WRONG IN HIS ACCUSATIONS!
HEAR ME, CITIZENS! I HAVE WON--AND THUS, I AM ABSOLVED OF ALL CHARGES AGAINST ME!
UNFAIR! HE WON BY A TECHNICALITY!
BOOOOO
HE'S STILL A MURDERER!
BOOOOO
HE'S NO HERO! THROW HIM OUT!
BOOOOO


EVEN THOUGH YOU ARE AQUITTED UNDER THE LAW, RAL DORN, YOU ARE STILL CONSIDERED A MURDERER!
YOU MAY JOIN THE RIDERS--BUT YOU HAVEN'T WON THEIR RESPECT!
RAL STALKS AWAY, STUNNED AND DEJECTED, AS THE SPECTATORS LEAVE THE STANDS!
LATER...
HAH! I'VE COME BACK FOR A LAST LOOK AT THE SCENE OF MY DEFEAT... THOUGH, EVEN WHEN I LOST, I WON!
THE SOFT HEARTED FOOL FREED ME! HE DARED NOT TAKE MY LIFE, NOT WHEN HE IS STILL BLAMED FOR KILLING THE DRAGONS!
BUT YOU KNOW WHERE THE BLAME TRULY LIES, DON'T YOU--MURDERER!
WHA--? RAL DORN!
COME TO GLOAT OVER YOUR HOLLOW VICTORY?
I'M NOT IMPRESSED BY YOUR ACT, SKAG--SO DROP IT! YOU SLEW THE YOUNGLINGS, OR ELSE YOU'D NEVER HAVE CHEATED IN THE TRIAL!
NOR WOULD EVEN MY ANDROID DRAGON EVER HAVE ACCEPTED ME AS A SYMBIOTE! DRAGONS CAN SENSE EVIL IN A PERSON!
YOU DON'T KNOW THE HALF OF IT, UPSTART!
IT WAS MY DRAGON, NOT I, WHO WENT MAD--BEYOND THE PALE OF TIME! HE WAS REJECTING THE SYMBIOSIS!
I HELD HIM IN THRALL WITH DRUGS--BUT I KNEW THAT COULDN'T LAST FOREVER!
AND IF I COULDN'T HAVE A DRAGON--THEN, NO ONE ELSE WOULD, EITHER! SLAYING THE YOUNG ONES WAS MY FIRST STEP!
I ADMIT IT ALL! BUT YOU'LL NEVER PROVE IT! NEVER!
OH, BUT I JUST HAVE!
THE RIDERS! WHERE DID THEY COME FROM?
THEY WUZ HERE, ALL ALONG, CREEP--SAME AS US!
YA JUST COULDN'T SEE US--THANKS TO SUZIE'S POWER TO MAKE STUFF INVISIBLE!

SO--YOU'VE FOUND ME OUT! BUT IT'LL DO YOU NO GOOD!
MY PLANS HAVE GONE TOO FAR! I TURNED THE DRAGONS LOOSE-- SENT THEM THROUGH TIME-- RIDERLESS!
EVEN NOW, THEY ARE ON THEIR WAY TO RAL'S BELOVED EARTH--TIME COORDINATES UNKNOWN!
"IMAGINE THE HAVOK THEY'LL WREAK--AS CONFUSED, THEY SPARK PANIC IN THE POPULATED AREAS!
"IN SELF PROTEC-TION, THE EARTH PEOPLE WILL HUNT THEM DOWN-- DESTROY THEM ALL!
"MY REVENGE WILL BE COMPLETE!"
WHY, YOU NO GOOD, STINKING SEWER RAT! I'M GONNA PULVERIZE YA!
NO, BEN! THAT WON'T SAVE EARTH-- OR THE DRAGONS!
THE RIDERS WILL PUNISH SKAG! WE'VE GOT TO FIND A WAY TO THWART HIS PLANS!

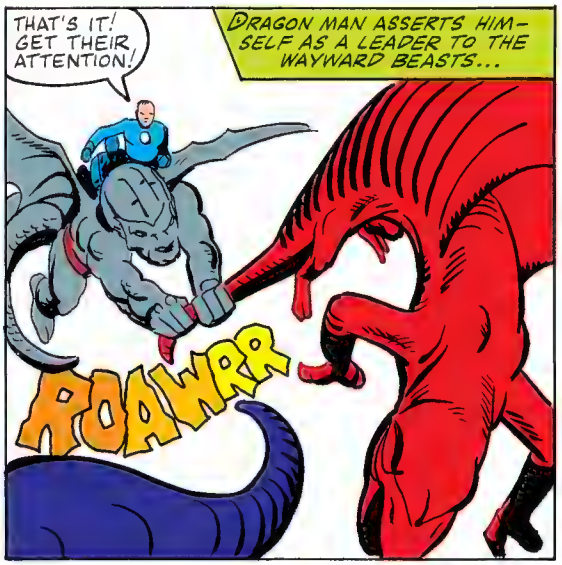
YOU'LL NEVER DO IT! WITHOUT THEIR DRAGONS TO GUIDE THEM, THE RIDERS WILL NEVER BE ABLE TO PINPOINT THE PROPER TIME PERIOD! YOU'RE STYMIED!
HE'S RIGHT!
NOT SO, YOUNGSTER! YOU HAVE YOURSELF PROVIDED THE MEANS TO SOLVE THIS PROBLEM!
OF COURSE!

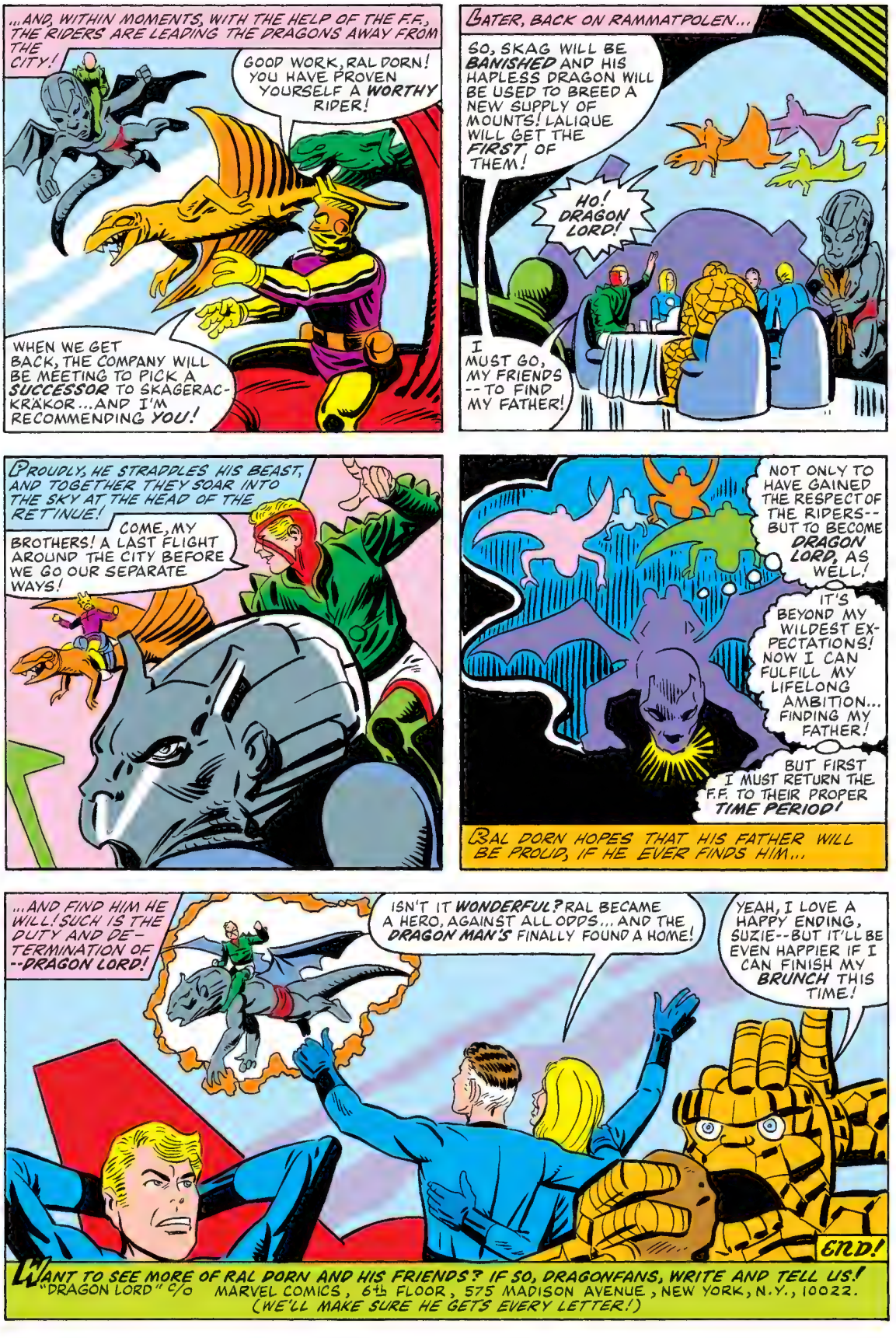
YOU MEAN--THE DRAGON MAN! BUT HIS TRUE TEMPORAL ABILITY IS UNTESTED! CAN EVEN HE GUIDE US ALL BACK TO EARTH--ACCURATELY?
IT'S A CHANCE WE'LL HAVE TO TAKE!


RAL BENDS HIS WILL TO THE SWIRLING TIMESTREAM, IN CONCERT WITH THE OTHER RIDERS...
BUT TO CORRELATE ALL THEIR DIVERSE MENTAL PATTERNS AND FOCUS THEM INTO A SINGLE DISTINCT DIRECTION --THAT IS A THING NO DRAGON HAS EVER MANAGED BEFORE! THE DRAGON MAN DUTIFULLY STRAINS TO PICK HIS WAY THROUGH THE SWIRLING CONFUSION OF THE EDDIES AND RIPTIDES OF TIME/SPACE!
AMAZINGLY, HE SUCCEEDS IN FINDING THE DIRECTION AND AVOIDING THE BLIND ALLEYS...

...AIDED BY--
MY BRAIN WAVE SCANNER! WITH A FEW ADJUSTMENTS, IT SHOULD BE ABLE TO DETECT THE DRAGONS!

THERE THEY ARE! WE'VE FOUND THEM!
BUT ARE WE IN TIME? THEY'RE HEADING TOWARD THE CITY!


THAT'S IT! GET THEIR ATTENTION!
DRAGON MAN ASSERTS HIMSELF AS A LEADER TO THE WAYWARD BEASTS...
ROAWRR


...AND, WITHIN MOMENTS, WITH THE HELP OF THE F.F., THE RIDERS ARE LEADING THE DRAGONS AWAY FROM THE CITY!
GOOD WORK, RAL DORN! YOU HAVE PROVEN YOURSELF A WORTHY RIDER!
WHEN WE GET BACK, THE COMPANY WILL BE MEETING TO PICK A SUCCESSOR TO SKAGERAC-KRÄKOR...AND I'M RECOMMENDING YOU!
LATER, BACK ON RAMMATPOLEN...
SO, SKAG WILL BE BANISHED AND HIS HAPLESS DRAGON WILL BE USED TO BREED A NEW SUPPLY OF MOUNTS! LALIQUE WILL GET THE FIRST OF THEM!
HO! DRAGON LORD!
I MUST GO, MY FRIENDS --TO FIND MY FATHER!
PROUDLY, HE STRADDLES HIS BEAST, AND TOGETHER THEY SOAR INTO THE SKY AT THE HEAD OF THE RETINUE!
COME, MY BROTHERS! A LAST FLIGHT AROUND THE CITY BEFORE WE GO OUR SEPARATE WAYS!
NOT ONLY TO HAVE GAINED THE RESPECT OF THE RIDERS--BUT TO BECOME DRAGON LORD, AS WELL!
IT'S BEYOND MY WILDEST EXPECTATIONS! NOW I CAN FULFILL MY LIFELONG AMBITION... FINDING MY FATHER!
BUT FIRST I MUST RETURN THE F.F. TO THEIR PROPER TIME PERIOD!
RAL DORN HOPES THAT HIS FATHER WILL BE PROUD, IF HE EVER FINDS HIM...
...AND FIND HIM HE WILL! SUCH IS THE DUTY AND DE-TERMINATION OF --DRAGON LORD!
ISN'T IT WONDERFUL? RAL BECAME A HERO, AGAINST ALL ODDS... AND THE DRAGON MAN'S FINALLY FOUND A HOME!
YEAH, I LOVE A HAPPY ENDING, SUZIE--BUT IT'LL BE EVEN HAPPIER IF I CAN FINISH MY BRUNCH THIS TIME!
END!
WANT TO SEE MORE OF RAL DORN AND HIS FRIENDS? IF SO, DRAGONFANS, WRITE AND TELL US!
"DRAGON LORD" C/O MARVEL COMICS, 6th FLOOR, 575 MADISON AVENUE, NEW YORK, N.Y., 10022.
(WE'LL MAKE SURE HE GETS EVERY LETTER!)

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THE MARVEL® COMICS GROUP PROUDLY PRESENTS:
THE 20TH ANNIVERSARY OF THE FABULOUS
Fantastic Four®
APPROVED BY THE COMICS CODE AUTHORITY
SPECIAL TRIPLE-SIZED ISSUE OF THE WORLD'S GREATEST COMIC MAGAZINE!
PLUS: AN ALL-NEW F.F. BLOCKBUSTER BY STAN (THE MAN) LEE AND JACK (KING) KIRBY!

IN CASE YOU JUST JOINED US...

Right from the start, it was obvious that THE FANTASTIC FOUR was an event. "The World's Greatest Comic Magazine," the cover of the first issue rather immodestly proclaimed. Writer-editor Stan Lee and artist Jack Kirby, who by 1961 had had several years working together on various monster and western comics, took on the task of creating a new group of super heroes, and, surrounded by an industry that had grown hidebound with convention and cliché, decided to cut loose. (For a description of the creation of the FF, see the introduction in Stan Lee's *Origin Of Marvel Comics*.) The result changed the face of comicbooks forever.

Here was a group of heroes who didn't look like Greek gods, who didn't have secret identities, who bickered frequently and broke up just as often. They fell victim to their own foibles more often than they were attacked by super-villains; in one issue, Reed couldn't pay the rent on the Baxter Building, and the FF were evicted from their headquarters. By FF #3, the basics had become stable — the FF wore costumes, they were housed in the Baxter Building, the interpersonal relationships were pretty well set — but change has always afflicted the group. Sue Storm's affections wavered between Reed Richards and The Sub-Mariner. The Thing himself had a crush on her until his girl friend, the blind sculptor Alicia Masters, entered his life. Sue and Johnny's father, Franklin Storm, was introduced just before his death. The FF lost their powers in a nuclear blast, only to have Dr. Doom take over their headquarters. The Thing turned evil and joined the Frightful Four, to be followed by the Torch before they reverted to normal. Johnny Storm fell in love with the Inhuman named Crystal when the FF met her tribe, The Inhumans. Reed and Sue got married. Johnny Storm went off to college. Ben Grimm became human again as his shape and strength were transferred to an imposter. Reed cured Ben, who reverted to the Thing to fight The Wizard. Sue Storm became pregnant and left the group, to be replaced by Crystal. Franklin Richards was born. Crystal left the group and Sue rejoined. The Thing temporarily gained the power to turn to Ben Grimm and back again at will. Sue left the group to be replaced by Medusa. Reed shut down his son's mind, so Sue left him and almost divorced him before a reconciliation took place. Crystal dropped Johnny and married Quicksilver. The Thing lost his powers, Power Man took his place in the group, and Ben Grimm began wearing a super-powered Thing suit. Reed lost his powers and broke up the group. (You get the idea.)

In the meantime, there were villains and guest-stars galore; almost every star in the Marvel universe set foot in the pages of the FF at one time or another. And it's a credit to the durability of the concepts originated by Stan and Jack that the FF spun off several series: The Human Torch starred in STRANGE TALES in Marvel's early days, The Thing appears with a guest monthly in MARVEL TWO-IN-ONE, and virtually *every* hero introduced in the FF has gone on to their own series: The Sub-Mariner, Dr. Doom (in one of the few series starring a villain), Colonel Nick Fury (later to become AGENT OF SHIELD), The Inhumans, The Silver Surfer, The Black Panther, and Warlock (known as Him in the early days).

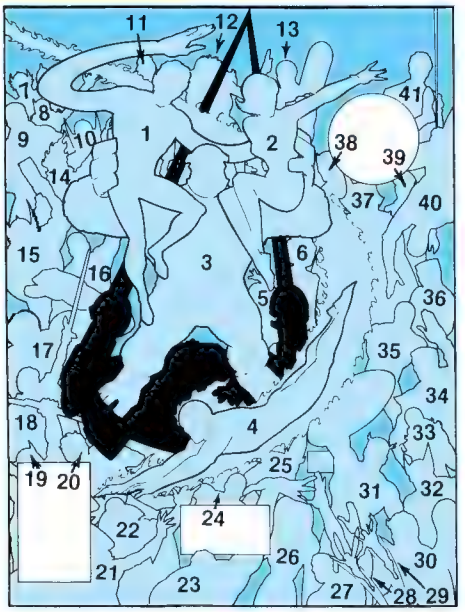
Together, Stan and Jack produced 108 episodes of the FF before they went their ways, episodes chock full of some of the most spectacular concepts ever to hit comics. Others — John Romita, John Buscema, Archie Goodwin, Roy Thomas, Ross Andru, Gerry Conway, Ramona Fradon, Rich Buckler, Len Wein, Bob Brown, George Pérez, Bill Mantlo, Mike Friedrich, Sal Buscema, Marv Wolfman, and John Byrne — have handled the creative reins on the Fantastic Four since then, but the Lee-Kirby work has been more than an example for them to follow; it is the tradition that inspired them. Now, as then, THE FANTASTIC FOUR is the World's Greatest Comic Magazine.

All in all, it's been a pretty good twenty years. With love and admiration, here's to twenty more.

A NOTE ON OUR SPECIAL FEATURE:

This issue's anniversary story by Stan Lee and Jack Kirby represents the first collaboration by that titanically talented duo since King Kirby left Marvel some years ago for the woolly wilds of animation studios. Long-time fans will recognize the story as a variation on the FF's first fabulous meeting with Dr. Doom in FANTASTIC FOUR #5 — and no wonder! When DePatie-Freleng started their Saturday morning cartoon show version of the FF, that story was among the first adapted... with storyboards by Jack, no less. When we were looking for a special feature, someone suggested we modify Jack's storyboard into a comics format, and voila! (A tip of the hat and many thanks to David DePatie and Jack Kirby for their consent and cooperation in this somewhat unusual undertaking.) As was the case on the TV show, The Human Torch has been replaced in the story by the now-defunct Herbie The Robot.

Sharp-eyed fans will also have noticed a difference in art style from page to page. As an extra-special treat, we corralled almost every inker who ever set pen to Jack's work on the FF and talked them into tackling a page or two. To spare you long sleepless nights trying to figure out who did what, here's a who's who of FF inkers, along with the pages they handled: Chic Stone — pgs. 1, 7, 12; Dick Ayers — pg. 2; Al Milgrom — pg. 3; Joe Sinnott — pgs. 4, 10; George Bell (a.k.a. George Roussos) — pg. 5; Sol Brodsky (the *original* FF inker and designer of the book's original logo) — pg. 6; Vince Colletta — pgs. 8, 11; Frank Giacoia — pg. 9; Pablo Marcos — pg. 13; John Byrne — pg. 14.



KEY TO THE CHARACTERS ON THE COVER:

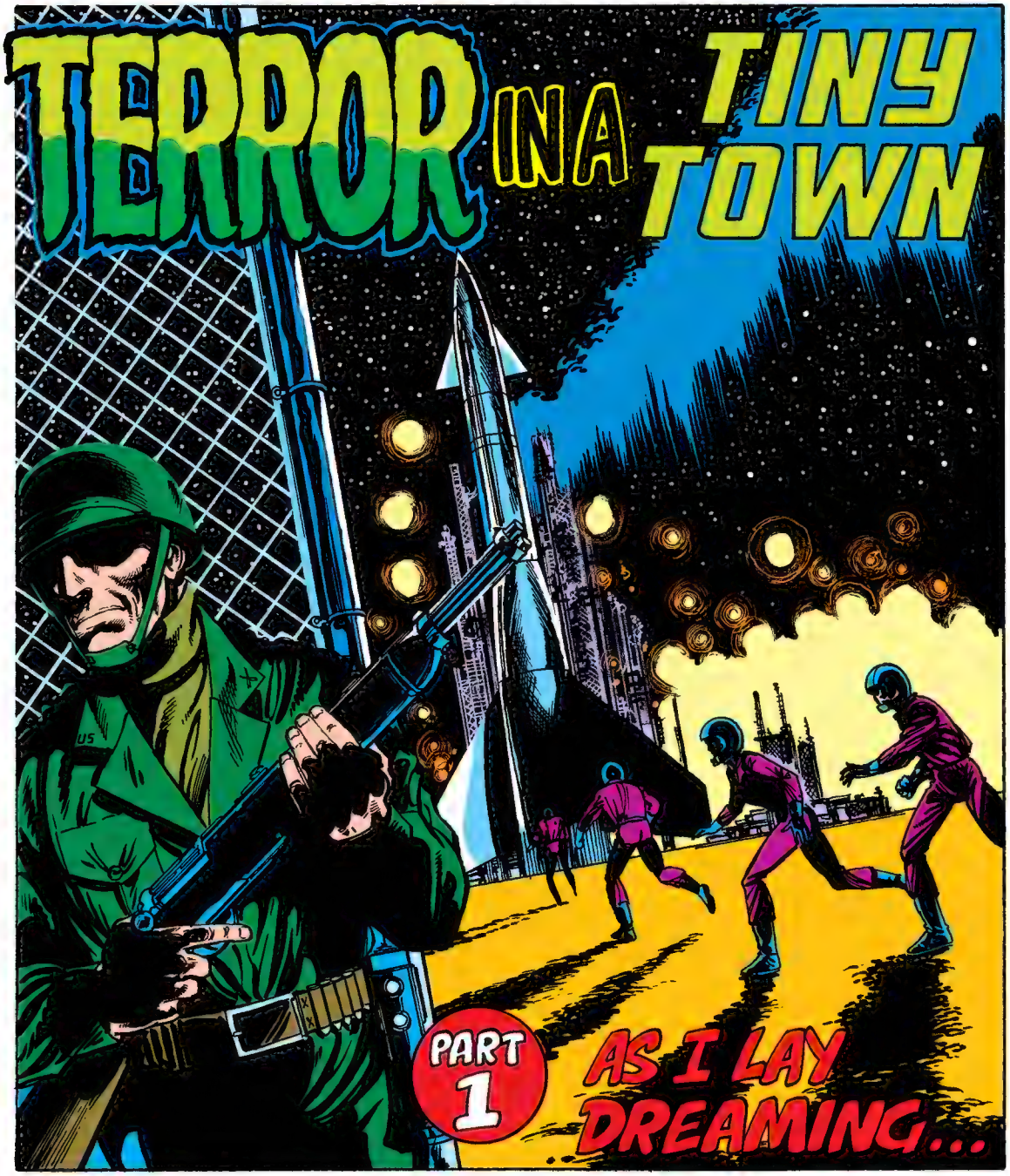
1) Mr. Fantastic (Reed Richards)
2) The Invisible Girl (Susan Storm Richards)
3) The Thing (Benjamin J. Grimm)
4) The Human Torch (Johnny Storm)
5) Franklin Richards
6) Agatha Harkness
7) Nighthawk
8) Hellcat
9) Luke Cage, Power Man
10) Iron Fist
11) Shang-Chi, Master of Kung Fu
12) The Savage She-Hulk
13) The Silver Surfer
14) The Ghost Rider
15) Thor
16) Iron Man
17) The Incredible Hulk
18) The Valkyrie
19) Hawkeye
20) Nightcrawler
21) The Scarlet Witch
22) The Vision
23) The Beast
24) Cyclops
25) The Impossible Man
26) Storm
27) Iceman
28) The Wasp
29) Yellowjacket
30) The Angel
31) Captain America
32) Wolverine
33) Sprite
34) Colossus
35) Daredevil
36) Prince Namor, The Sub-Mariner
37) Dr. Strange
38) The Black Panther
39) The FF's mailman, Willie Lumpkin
40) The Amazing Spider-Man
41) Stan Lee

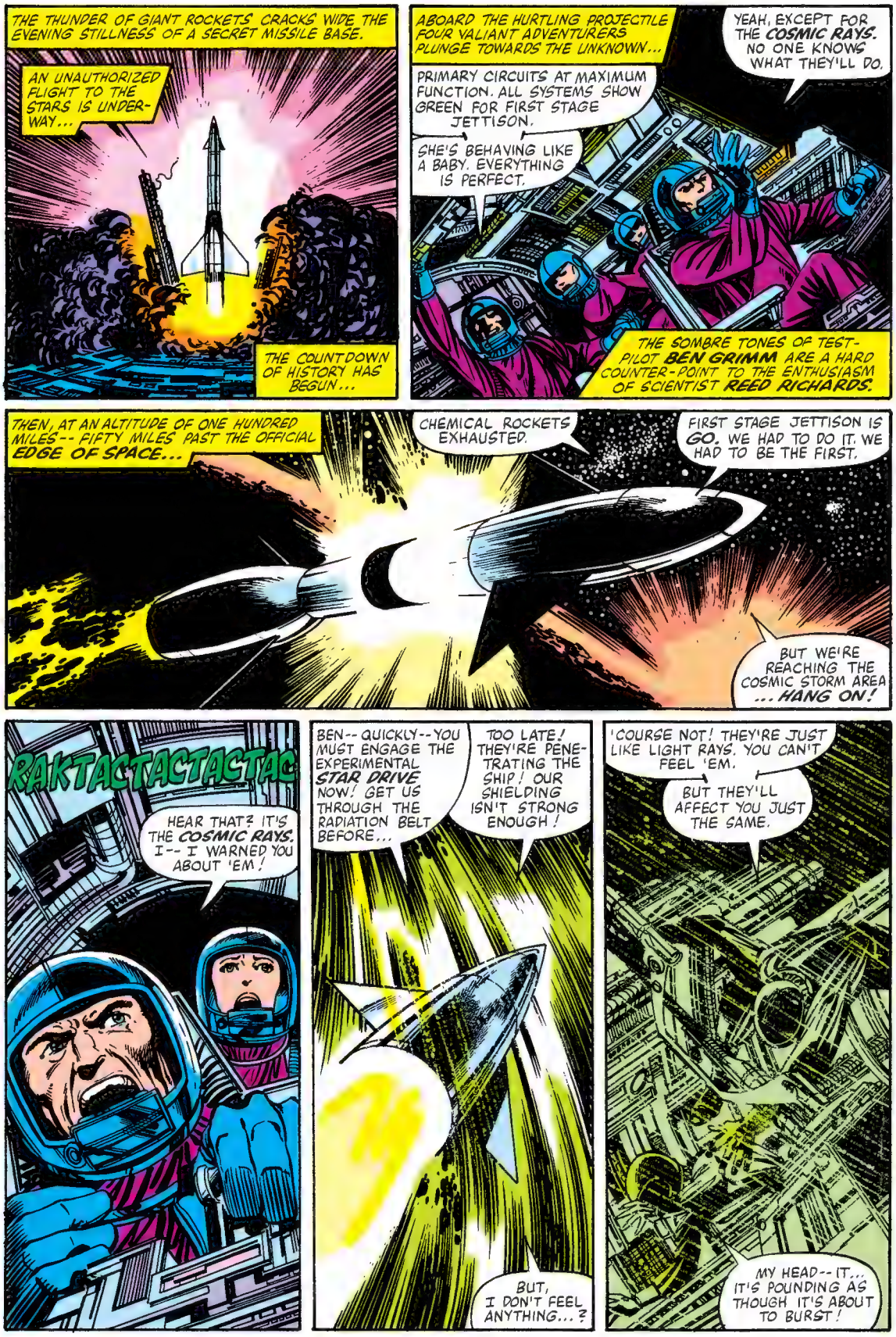
IN 1961 STAN LEE AND JACK KIRBY REVOLUTIONIZED THE COMICBOOK INDUSTRY WITH THE INTRODUCTION OF A NEW AND DARINGLY DIFFERENT GROUP OF SUPER HEROES. NOW WE PROUDLY INVITE YOU TO JOIN WITH US IN CELEBRATING THE 20TH ANNIVERSARY OF THE WORLD'S GREATEST COMIC MAGAZINE!

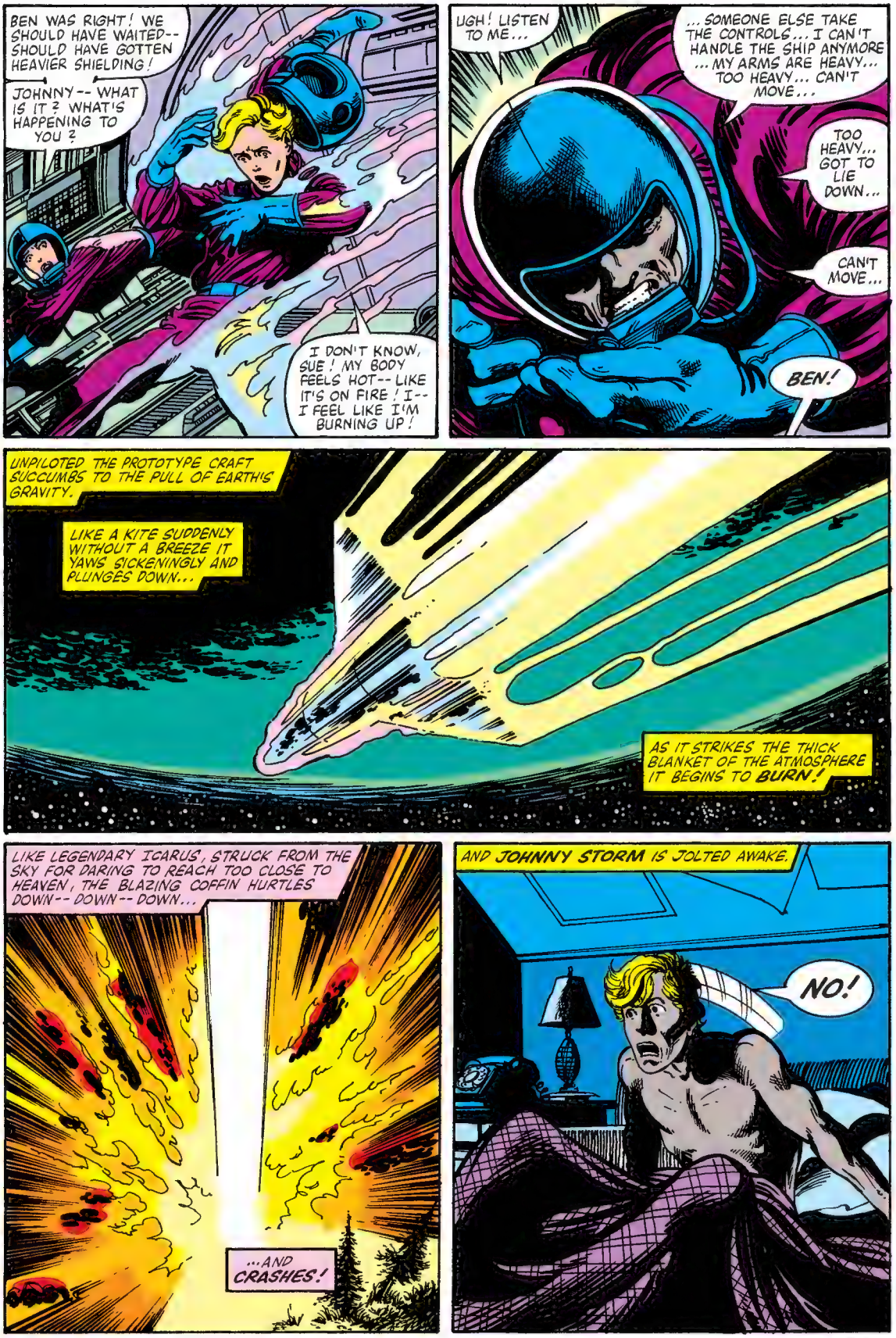
Stan Lee PRESENTS: THE FANTASTIC FOUR!®

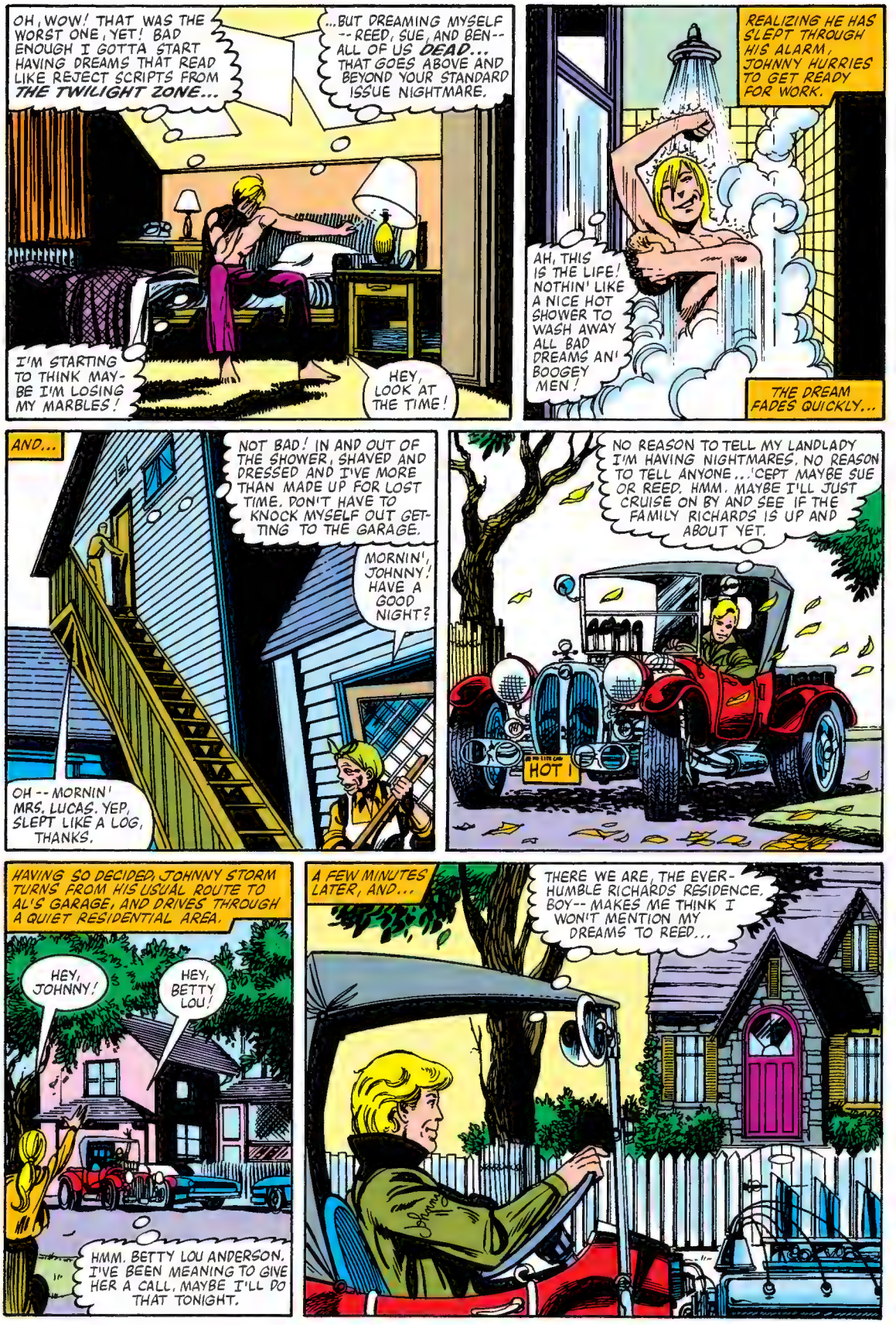
JOHN BYRNE / WORDS & PICTURES | JIM NOVAK / LETTERS | GLYNIS WEIN / COLORS | JIM SALICRUP / EDITOR | JIM SHOOTER / EDITOR-IN-CHIEF

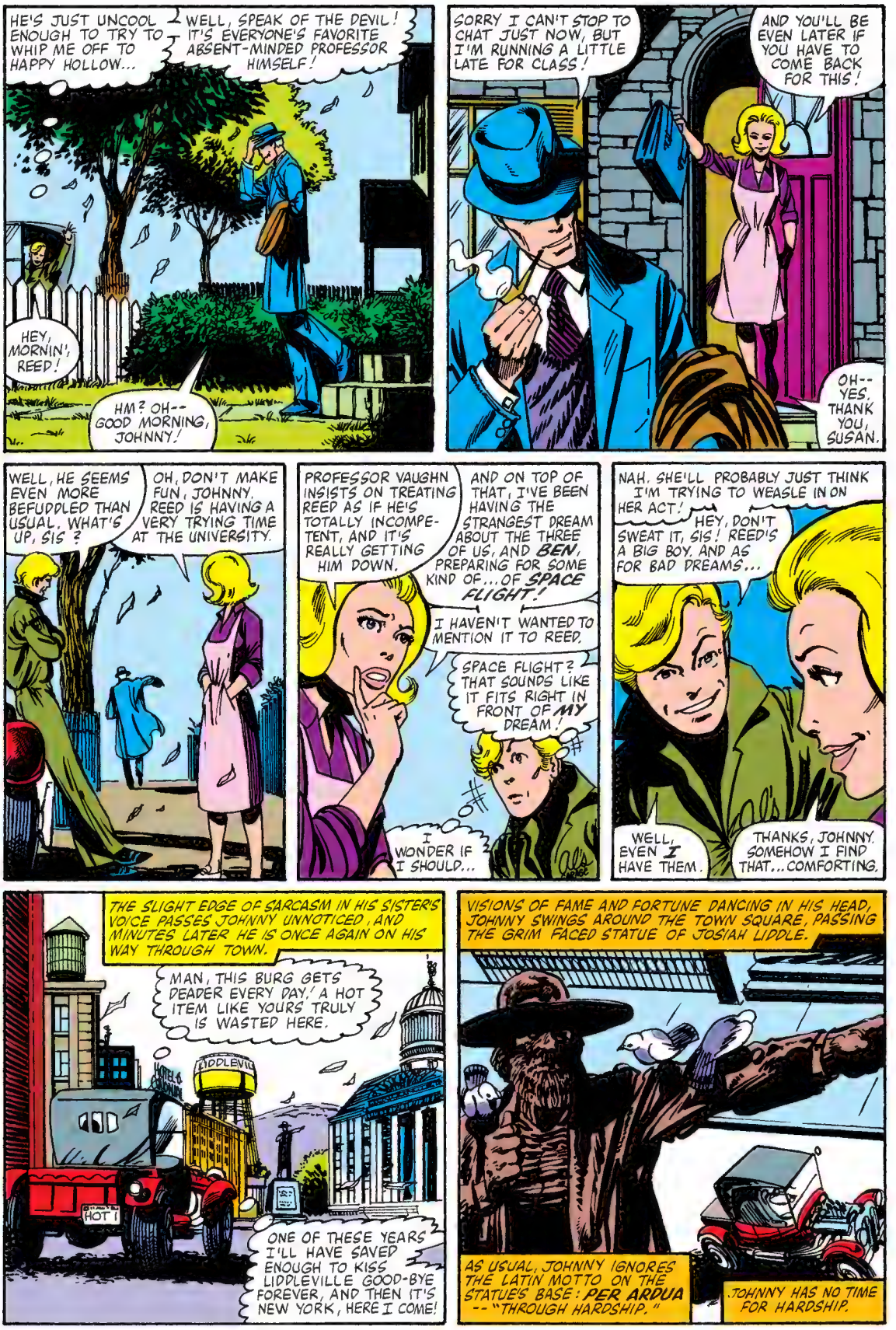
TERROR IN A TINY TOWN

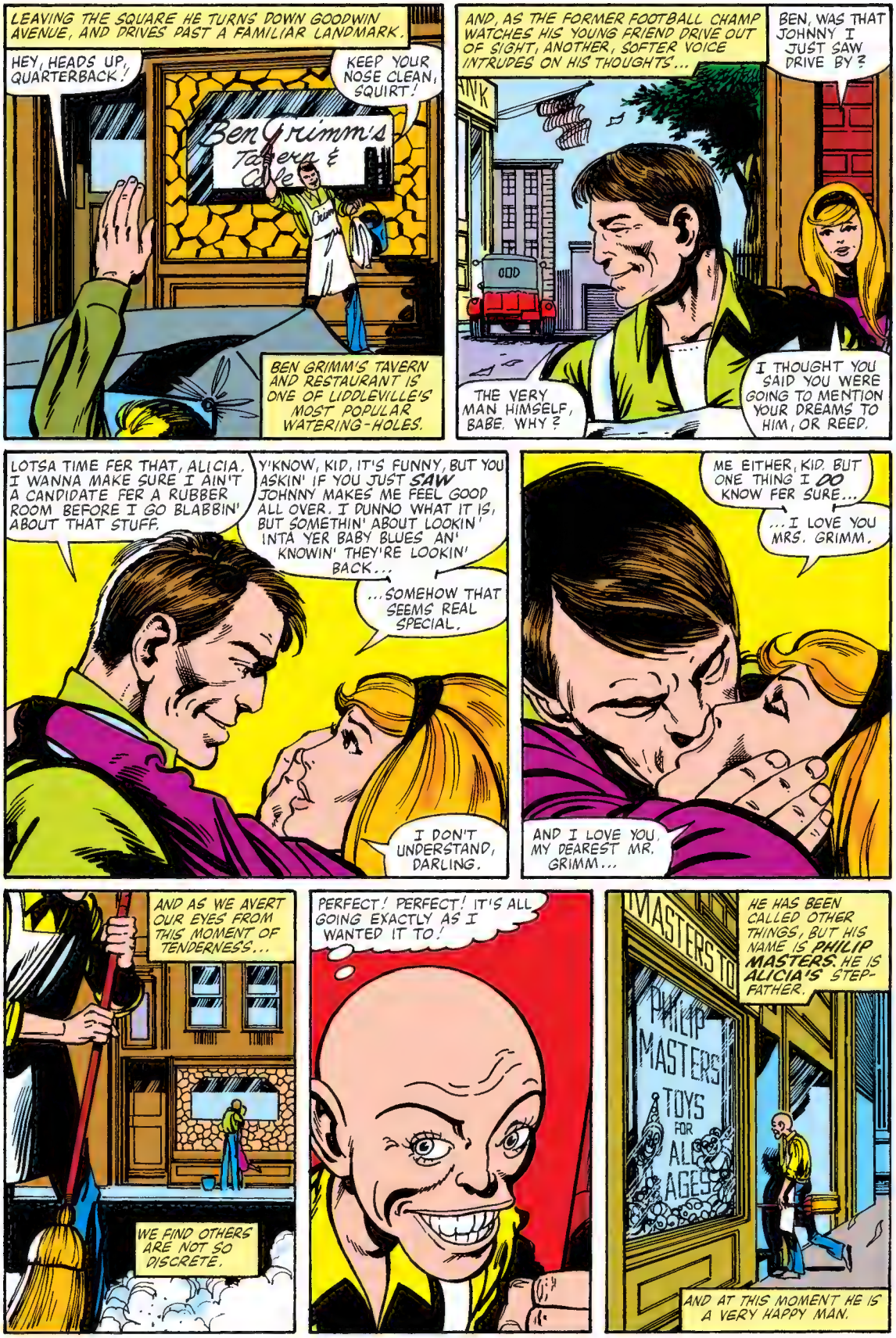



THE THUNDER OF GIANT ROCKETS CRACKS WIDE THE EVENING STILLNESS OF A SECRET MISSILE BASE.
AN UNAUTHORIZED FLIGHT TO THE STARS IS UNDER-WAY...
THE COUNTDOWN OF HISTORY HAS BEGUN...
ABOARD THE HURTLING PROJECTILE FOUR VALIANT ADVENTURERS PLUNGE TOWARDS THE UNKNOWN...
PRIMARY CIRCUITS AT MAXIMUM FUNCTION. ALL SYSTEMS SHOW GREEN FOR FIRST STAGE JETTISON.
SHE'S BEHAVING LIKE A BABY. EVERYTHING IS PERFECT.
YEAH, EXCEPT FOR THE COSMIC RAYS. NO ONE KNOWS WHAT THEY'LL DO.
THE SOMBRE TONES OF TEST-PILOT BEN GRIMM ARE A HARD COUNTER-POINT TO THE ENTHUSIASM OF SCIENTIST REED RICHARDS.
THEN, AT AN ALTITUDE OF ONE HUNDRED MILES -- FIFTY MILES PAST THE OFFICIAL EDGE OF SPACE...
CHEMICAL ROCKETS EXHAUSTED.
FIRST STAGE JETTISON IS GO. WE HAD TO DO IT. WE HAD TO BE THE FIRST.
BUT WE'RE REACHING THE COSMIC STORM AREA ... HANG ON!
RAKTACTACTACTAC
HEAR THAT? IT'S THE COSMIC RAYS. I -- I WARNED YOU ABOUT 'EM!
BEN -- QUICKLY -- YOU MUST ENGAGE THE EXPERIMENTAL STAR DRIVE NOW! GET US THROUGH THE RADIATION BELT BEFORE...
TOO LATE! THEY'RE PENE-TRATING THE SHIP! OUR SHIELDING ISN'T STRONG ENOUGH!
BUT, I DON'T FEEL ANYTHING...?
'COURSE NOT! THEY'RE JUST LIKE LIGHT RAYS. YOU CAN'T FEEL 'EM.
BUT THEY'LL AFFECT YOU JUST THE SAME.
MY HEAD -- IT... IT'S POUNDING AS THOUGH IT'S ABOUT TO BURST!


BEN WAS RIGHT! WE SHOULD HAVE WAITED-- SHOULD HAVE GOTTEN HEAVIER SHIELDING!
JOHNNY-- WHAT IS IT? WHAT'S HAPPENING TO YOU?
I DON'T KNOW, SUE! MY BODY FEELS HOT-- LIKE IT'S ON FIRE! I-- I FEEL LIKE I'M BURNING UP!
UGH! LISTEN TO ME...
...SOMEONE ELSE TAKE THE CONTROLS... I CAN'T HANDLE THE SHIP ANYMORE ...MY ARMS ARE HEAVY... TOO HEAVY... CAN'T MOVE...
TOO HEAVY... GOT TO LIE DOWN...
CAN'T MOVE...
BEN!
UNPILOTED THE PROTOTYPE CRAFT SUCCUMBS TO THE PULL OF EARTH'S GRAVITY.
LIKE A KITE SUDDENLY WITHOUT A BREEZE IT YAWS SICKENINGLY AND PLUNGES DOWN...
AS IT STRIKES THE THICK BLANKET OF THE ATMOSPHERE IT BEGINS TO BURN!
LIKE LEGENDARY ICARUS, STRUCK FROM THE SKY FOR DARING TO REACH TOO CLOSE TO HEAVEN, THE BLAZING COFFIN HURTLES DOWN-- DOWN-- DOWN...
...AND CRASHES!
AND JOHNNY STORM IS JOLTED AWAKE.
NO!

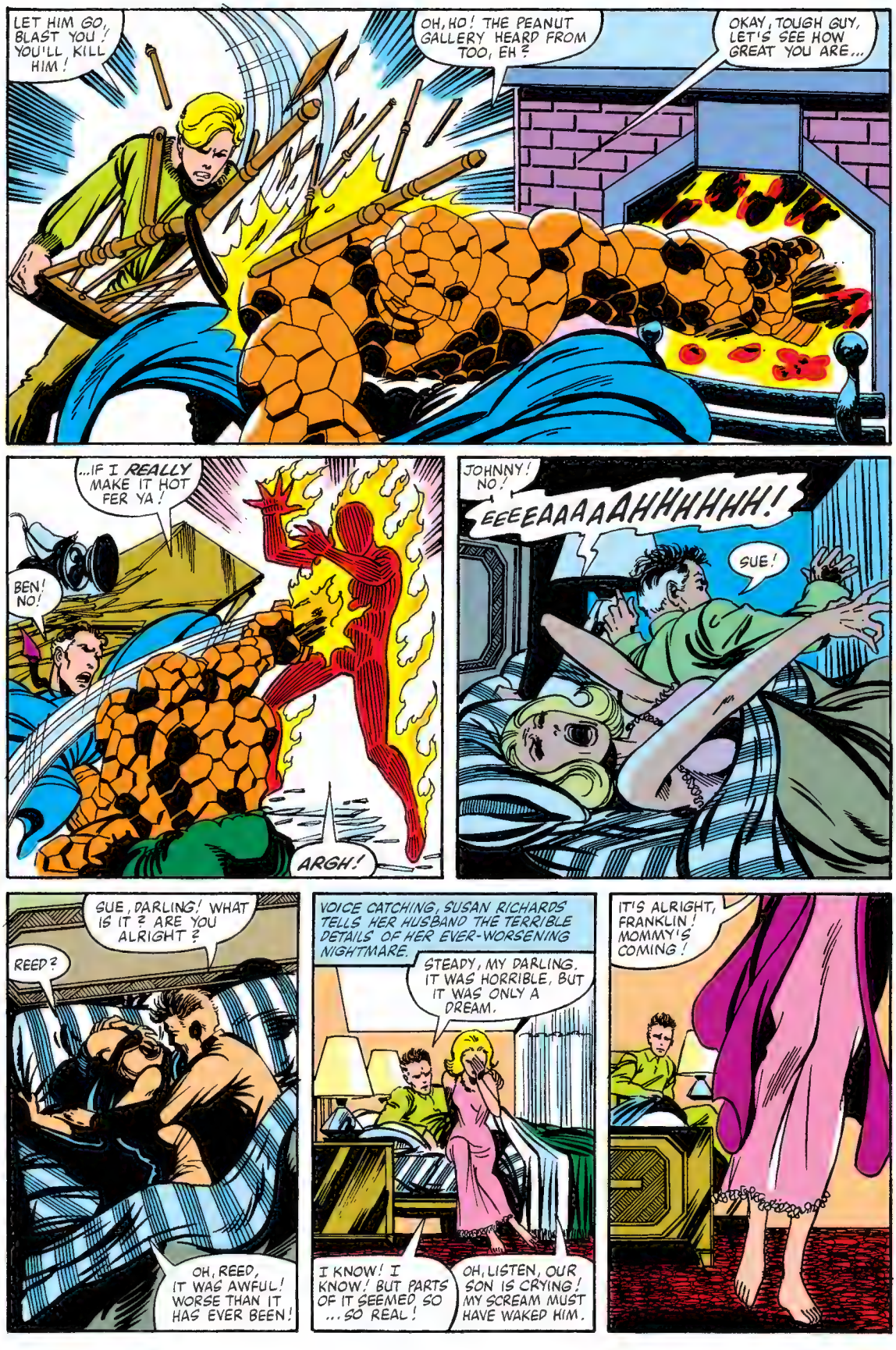

OH, WOW! THAT WAS THE WORST ONE, YET! BAD ENOUGH I GOTTA START HAVING DREAMS THAT READ LIKE REJECT SCRIPTS FROM THE TWILIGHT ZONE...
...BUT DREAMING MYSELF -- REED, SUE, AND BEN -- ALL OF US DEAD... THAT GOES ABOVE AND BEYOND YOUR STANDARD ISSUE NIGHTMARE.
I'M STARTING TO THINK MAYBE I'M LOSING MY MARBLES!
HEY, LOOK AT THE TIME!
REALIZING HE HAS SLEPT THROUGH HIS ALARM, JOHNNY HURRIES TO GET READY FOR WORK.
AH, THIS IS THE LIFE! NOTHIN' LIKE A NICE HOT SHOWER TO WASH AWAY ALL BAD DREAMS AN' BOOGEY MEN!
THE DREAM FADES QUICKLY...
AND...
NOT BAD! IN AND OUT OF THE SHOWER, SHAVED AND DRESSED AND I'VE MORE THAN MADE UP FOR LOST TIME. DON'T HAVE TO KNOCK MYSELF OUT GETTING TO THE GARAGE.
MORNIN', JOHNNY! HAVE A GOOD NIGHT?
OH -- MORNIN' MRS. LUCAS. YEP, SLEPT LIKE A LOG, THANKS.
NO REASON TO TELL MY LANDLADY I'M HAVING NIGHTMARES. NO REASON TO TELL ANYONE...'CEPT MAYBE SUE OR REED. HMM. MAYBE I'LL JUST CRUISE ON BY AND SEE IF THE FAMILY RICHARDS IS UP AND ABOUT YET.
HOT 1
HAVING SO DECIDED, JOHNNY STORM TURNS FROM HIS USUAL ROUTE TO AL'S GARAGE, AND DRIVES THROUGH A QUIET RESIDENTIAL AREA.
HEY, JOHNNY!
HEY, BETTY LOU!
HMM. BETTY LOU ANDERSON. I'VE BEEN MEANING TO GIVE HER A CALL. MAYBE I'LL DO THAT TONIGHT.
A FEW MINUTES LATER, AND...
THERE WE ARE, THE EVER-HUMBLE RICHARDS RESIDENCE. BOY -- MAKES ME THINK I WON'T MENTION MY DREAMS TO REED...

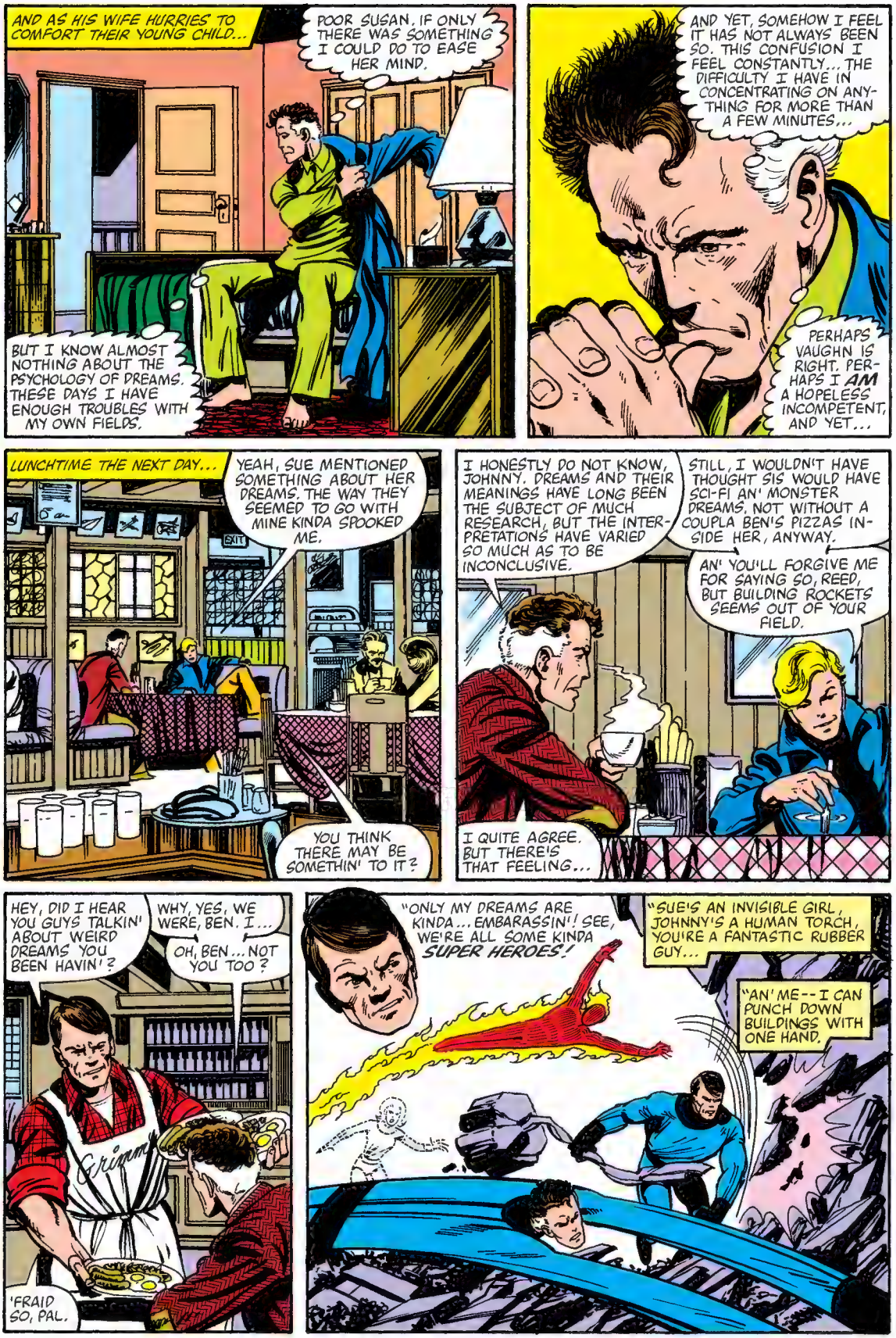

HE'S JUST UNCOOL ENOUGH TO TRY TO WHIP ME OFF TO HAPPY HOLLOW...
WELL, SPEAK OF THE DEVIL! IT'S EVERYONE'S FAVORITE ABSENT-MINDED PROFESSOR HIMSELF!
HEY, MORNIN', REED!
HM? OH-- GOOD MORNING, JOHNNY!
SORRY I CAN'T STOP TO CHAT JUST NOW, BUT I'M RUNNING A LITTLE LATE FOR CLASS!
AND YOU'LL BE EVEN LATER IF YOU HAVE TO COME BACK FOR THIS!
OH-- YES, THANK YOU, SUSAN.
WELL, HE SEEMS EVEN MORE BEFUDDLED THAN USUAL. WHAT'S UP, SIS?
OH, DON'T MAKE FUN, JOHNNY. REED IS HAVING A VERY TRYING TIME AT THE UNIVERSITY.
PROFESSOR VAUGHN INSISTS ON TREATING REED AS IF HE'S TOTALLY INCOMPETENT, AND IT'S REALLY GETTING HIM DOWN.
AND ON TOP OF THAT, I'VE BEEN HAVING THE STRANGEST DREAM ABOUT THE THREE OF US, AND BEN, PREPARING FOR SOME KIND OF... OF SPACE FLIGHT!
I HAVEN'T WANTED TO MENTION IT TO REED.
SPACE FLIGHT? THAT SOUNDS LIKE IT FITS RIGHT IN FRONT OF MY DREAM!
I WONDER IF I SHOULD...
NAH. SHE'LL PROBABLY JUST THINK I'M TRYING TO WEASLE IN ON HER ACT!
HEY, DON'T SWEAT IT, SIS! REED'S A BIG BOY. AND AS FOR BAD DREAMS...
WELL, EVEN I HAVE THEM.
THANKS, JOHNNY. SOMEHOW I FIND THAT... COMFORTING.
THE SLIGHT EDGE OF SARCASM IN HIS SISTER'S VOICE PASSES JOHNNY UNNOTICED, AND MINUTES LATER HE IS ONCE AGAIN ON HIS WAY THROUGH TOWN.
MAN, THIS BURG GETS DEADER EVERY DAY. A HOT ITEM LIKE YOURS TRULY IS WASTED HERE.
LIDDLEVILLE
HOTEL
HOT!
ONE OF THESE YEARS I'LL HAVE SAVED ENOUGH TO KISS LIDDLEVILLE GOOD-BYE FOREVER, AND THEN IT'S NEW YORK, HERE I COME!
VISIONS OF FAME AND FORTUNE DANCING IN HIS HEAD, JOHNNY SWINGS AROUND THE TOWN SQUARE, PASSING THE GRIM FACED STATUE OF JOSIAH LIDDLE.
AS USUAL, JOHNNY IGNORES THE LATIN MOTTO ON THE STATUE'S BASE: PER ARDUA -- "THROUGH HARDSHIP."
JOHNNY HAS NO TIME FOR HARDSHIP.

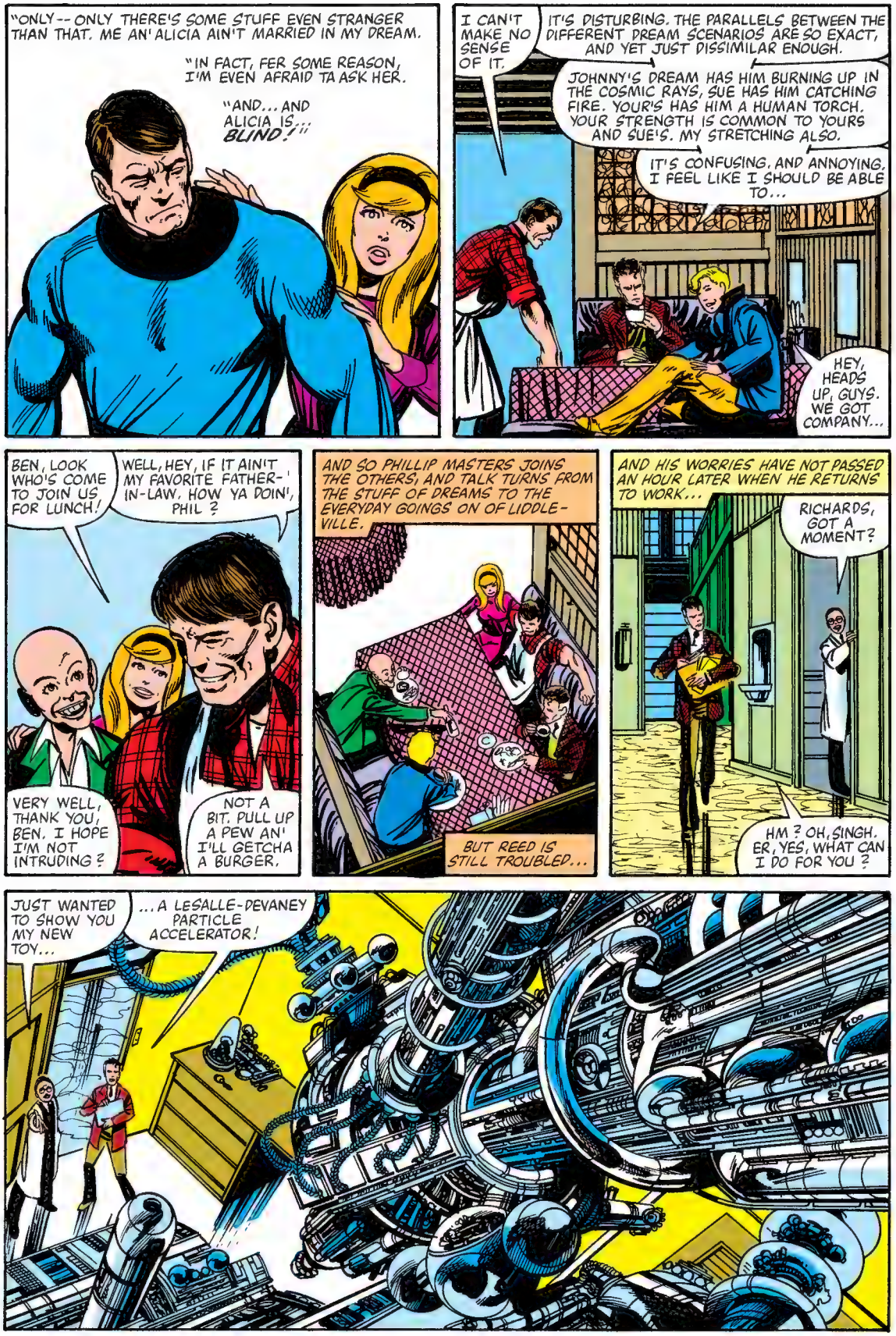

LEAVING THE SQUARE HE TURNS DOWN GOODWIN AVENUE, AND DRIVES PAST A FAMILIAR LANDMARK.
HEY, HEADS UP, QUARTERBACK!
KEEP YOUR NOSE CLEAN, SQUIRT!
Ben Grimm's Tavern & Cafe
BEN GRIMM'S TAVERN AND RESTAURANT IS ONE OF LIDDLEVILLE'S MOST POPULAR WATERING-HOLES.
AND, AS THE FORMER FOOTBALL CHAMP WATCHES HIS YOUNG FRIEND DRIVE OUT OF SIGHT, ANOTHER, SOFTER VOICE INTRUDES ON HIS THOUGHTS...
BEN, WAS THAT JOHNNY I JUST SAW DRIVE BY?
THE VERY MAN HIMSELF, BABE. WHY?
I THOUGHT YOU SAID YOU WERE GOING TO MENTION YOUR DREAMS TO HIM, OR REED.
LOTSA TIME FER THAT, ALICIA. I WANNA MAKE SURE I AIN'T A CANDIDATE FER A RUBBER ROOM BEFORE I GO BLABBIN' ABOUT THAT STUFF.
Y'KNOW, KID, IT'S FUNNY, BUT YOU ASKIN' IF YOU JUST SAW JOHNNY MAKES ME FEEL GOOD ALL OVER. I DUNNO WHAT IT IS, BUT SOMETHIN' ABOUT LOOKIN' INTA YER BABY BLUES AN' KNOWIN' THEY'RE LOOKIN' BACK...
...SOMEHOW THAT SEEMS REAL SPECIAL.
I DON'T UNDERSTAND, DARLING.
ME EITHER, KID. BUT ONE THING I DO KNOW FER SURE...
...I LOVE YOU MRS. GRIMM.
AND I LOVE YOU, MY DEAREST MR. GRIMM...
AND AS WE AVERT OUR EYES FROM THIS MOMENT OF TENDERNESS...
WE FIND OTHERS ARE NOT SO DISCRETE.
PERFECT! PERFECT! IT'S ALL GOING EXACTLY AS I WANTED IT TO!
MASTERS TO
PHILIP MASTERS TOYS FOR ALL AGES
HE HAS BEEN CALLED OTHER THINGS, BUT HIS NAME IS PHILIP MASTERS. HE IS ALICIA'S STEP-FATHER.
AND AT THIS MOMENT HE IS A VERY HAPPY MAN.

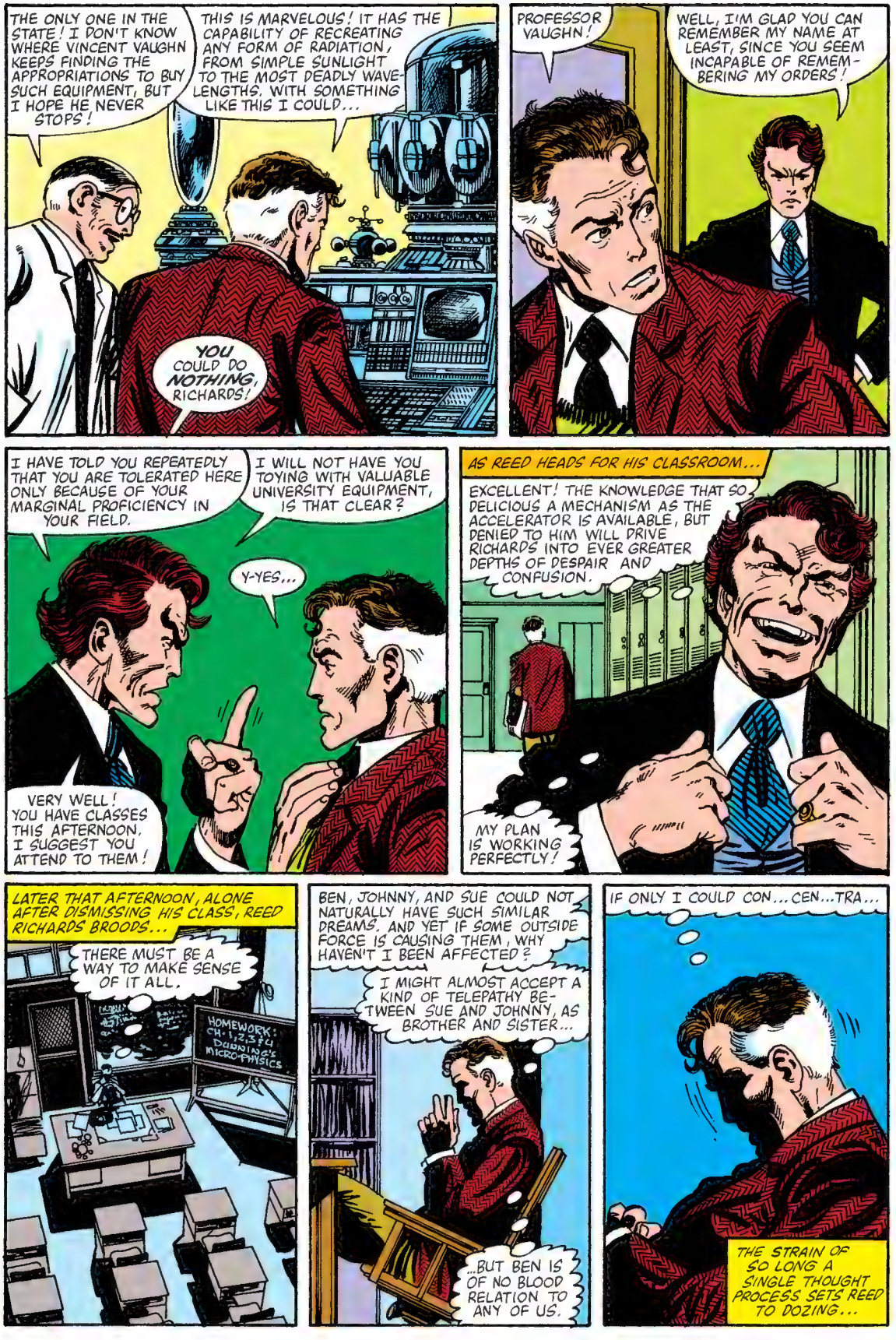
FIFTEEN HOURS LATER, ONCE AGAIN AT THE HOME OF SUE AND REED RICHARDS...
HOW DID IT GO AT COLLEGE TODAY, DEAR? ANY MORE TROUBLES WITH PROFESSOR VAUGHN?
HM? OH--OH, NO. HE WASN'T IN TODAY. I TOOK THE OPPORTUNITY TO DISCUSS MY PROBLEM WITH SOME OF THE OTHER INSTRUCTORS. BUT, EXCEPT FOR DOCTOR SINGH THEY ALL THINK I'M PARANOID. OR, WORSE, THEY AGREE WITH VAUGHN.
SUSAN DOES WHAT SHE CAN TO EASE HER HUSBAND'S WORRIES...
AND WITHIN THE HOUR BOTH HAVE DRIFTED OFF TO SLEEP...
REED RICHARDS' SLUMBER IS DEEP AND UNTROUBLED.
HIS WIFE IS NOT SO LUCKY...
THE DREAM...
I'M SORRY WITH ALL MY HEART TO FIND YOU SO SET AGAINST ME, BEN, BUT THE PROJECT MUST GO AHEAD AS PLANNED.
IT AIN'T YOU I'M AGAINST, REED, AN' YOU KNOW IT. BUT YOU HAVEN'T TAKEN ENOUGH SAFETY PRECAUTIONS!
AN' UNTIL YOU GET SOME DECENT SHIELDING ON THAT SHIP, IF YOU WANNA FLY TO THE STARS, YOU PILOT THE THING. COUNT ME OUT!
BEN, WE'VE BEEN THROUGH ALL THIS BEFORE. I KNOW THERE ARE DANGERS, BUT THE GAINS WE COULD MAKE--EVEN IN TERMS OF PURE KNOWLEDGE--ARE WORTH THE RISKS.
SEZ YOU! YOU'D WALK NAKED INTO A BLAST FURNACE IF YOU THOUGHT YOU'D LEARN SOMETHIN'.
YOU KNOW WE HAVEN'T DONE ENOUGH RESEARCH INTO THE EFFECTS OF COSMIC RAYS. THEY MIGHT KILL US ALL OUT IN SPACE.
BEN, YOU KNOW WE HAVE ONLY A LITTLE TIME. REED'S PRIVATE FORTUNE IS ALMOST EXHAUSTED. IF WE DON'T SHOW RESULTS THE GOVERNMENT MAY CUT OFF ITS FUNDING.
I... I NEVER THOUGHT YOU WOULD BE A COWARD!
NORMALLY THE DREAM ENDS HERE...
TONIGHT IT DOES NOT...
A COWARD?
RIP!
RRRIPP!
BEN!
NOBODY CALLS ME A COWARD!

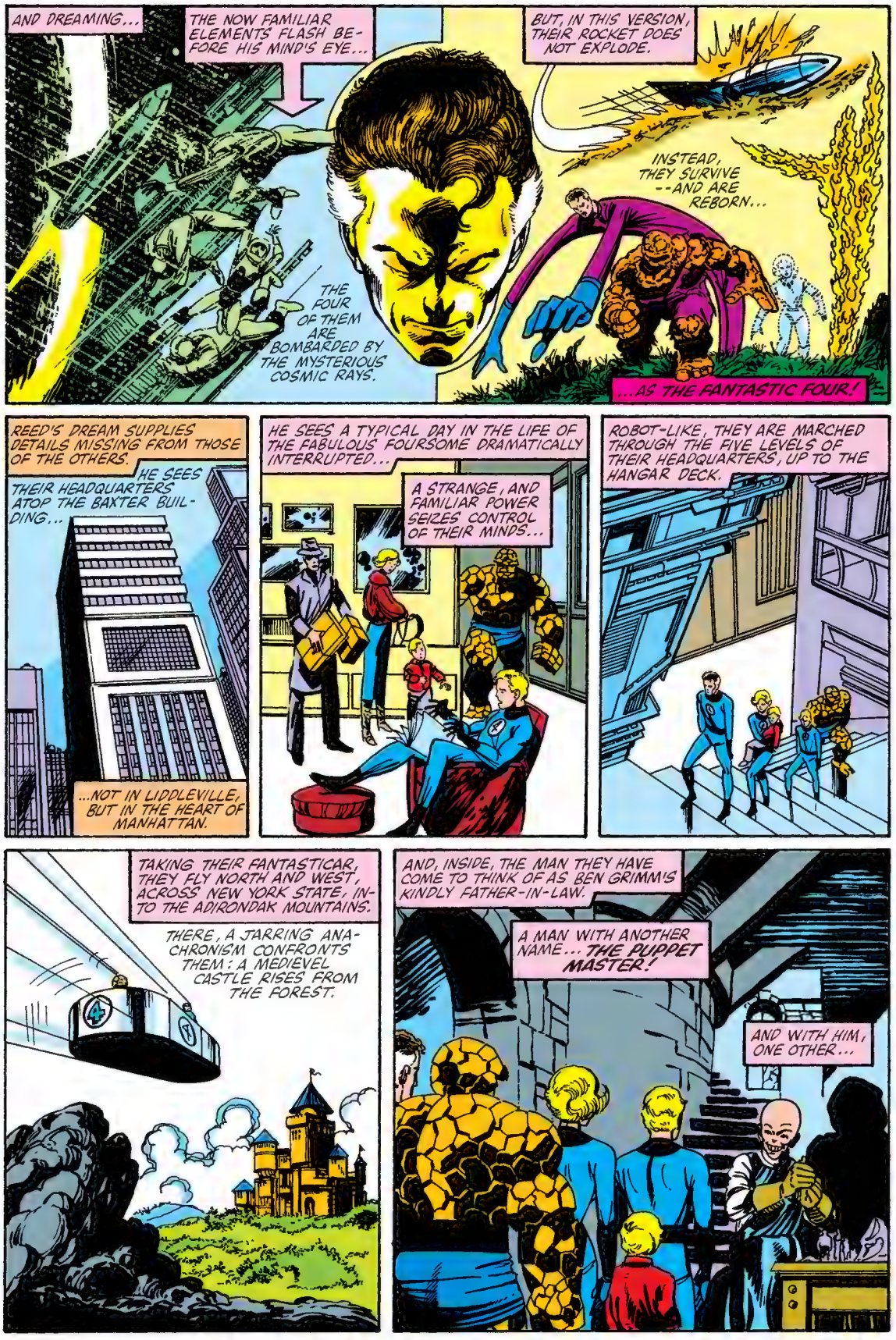
NOT YOU -- NOT ANYBODY! I'LL SMASH ANYONE WHO CALLS ME THAT!
REED! BEN'S TURNED INTO A... A THING!
SUE--GET OUT OF HIS WAY!
YOU -- RICHARDS! IT'S BECAUSE OF YOU I'M LIKE THIS. BECAUSE YOU WOULDN'T WAIT. BECAUSE YOU'D RISK ANYTHING, EVEN OTHER PEOPLE'S LIVES, IN THE NAME OF "SCIENCE!"
SMASH!
BEN, STOP! IF YOU CAN'T CONTROL YOURSELF...
I'LL DO IT FOR YOU!
NO GOOD, RUBBER-MAN!
TURNIN' INTA A HUMAN ELASTIC BAND DON'T COUNT FER SPIT AGAINST MY STRENGTH!
REED!

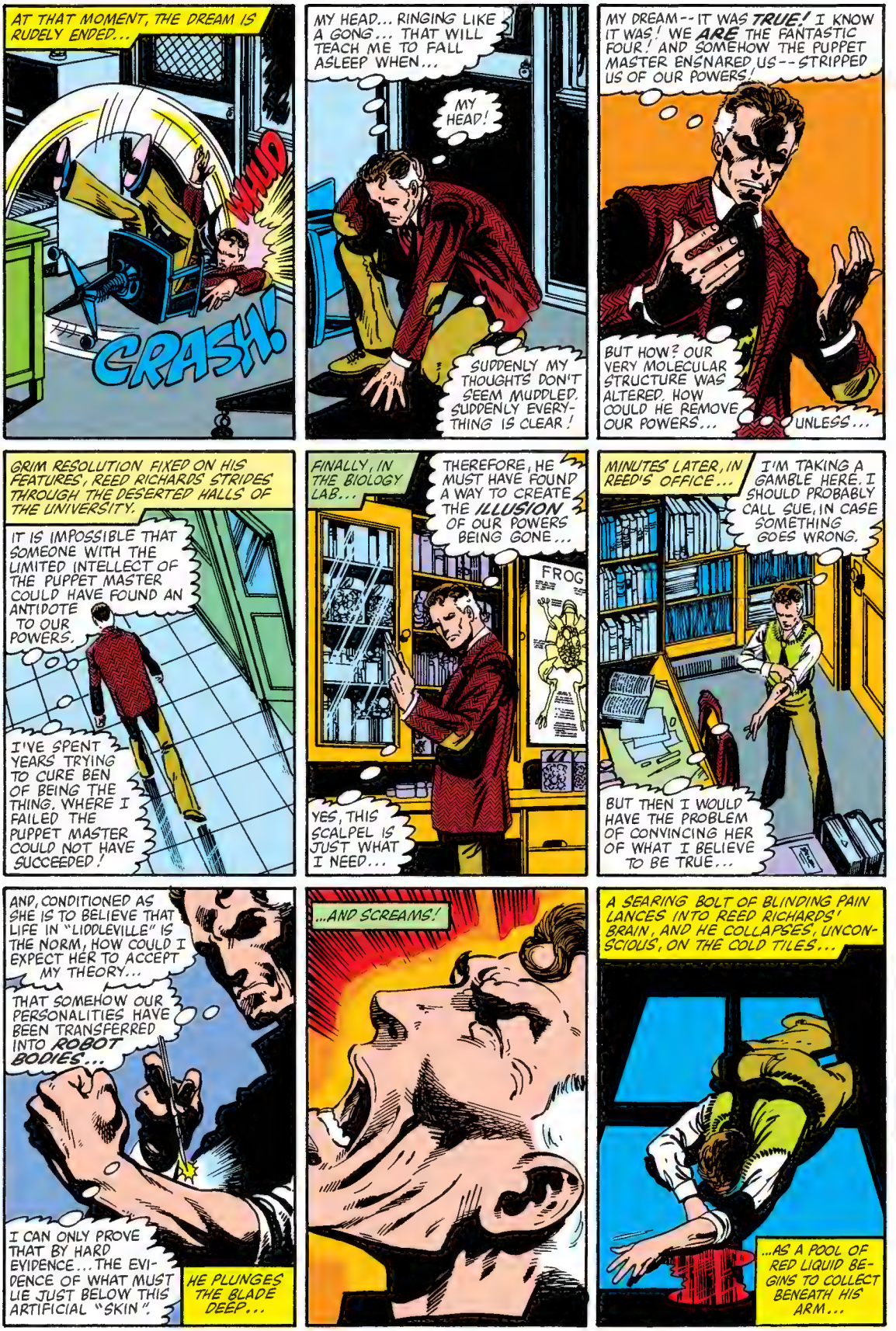

LET HIM GO, BLAST YOU! YOU'LL KILL HIM!
OH, HO! THE PEANUT GALLERY HEARD FROM TOO, EH?
OKAY, TOUGH GUY, LET'S SEE HOW GREAT YOU ARE...
...IF I REALLY MAKE IT HOT FER YA!
BEN! NO!
ARGH!
JOHNNY! NO!
EEEEAAAAAHHHHHH!
SUE!
SUE, DARLING! WHAT IS IT? ARE YOU ALRIGHT?
REED?
OH, REED, IT WAS AWFUL! WORSE THAN IT HAS EVER BEEN!
VOICE CATCHING, SUSAN RICHARDS TELLS HER HUSBAND THE TERRIBLE DETAILS OF HER EVER-WORSENING NIGHTMARE.
STEADY, MY DARLING, IT WAS HORRIBLE, BUT IT WAS ONLY A DREAM.
I KNOW! I KNOW! BUT PARTS OF IT SEEMED SO ...SO REAL!
OH, LISTEN, OUR SON IS CRYING! MY SCREAM MUST HAVE WAKED HIM.
IT'S ALRIGHT, FRANKLIN! MOMMY'S COMING!

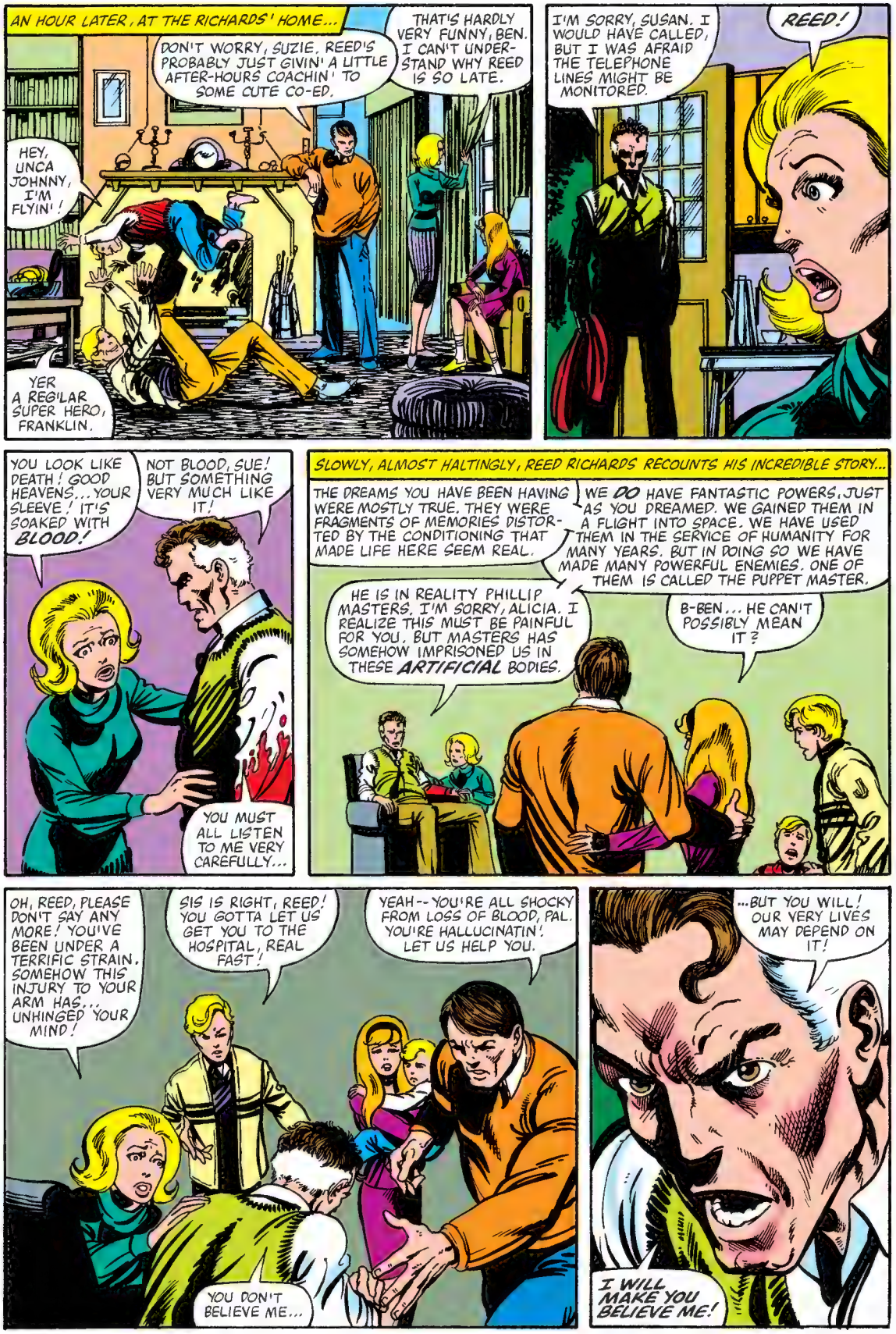

AND AS HIS WIFE HURRIES TO COMFORT THEIR YOUNG CHILD...
POOR SUSAN. IF ONLY THERE WAS SOMETHING I COULD DO TO EASE HER MIND.
BUT I KNOW ALMOST NOTHING ABOUT THE PSYCHOLOGY OF DREAMS. THESE DAYS I HAVE ENOUGH TROUBLES WITH MY OWN FIELDS.
AND YET, SOMEHOW I FEEL IT HAS NOT ALWAYS BEEN SO. THIS CONFUSION I FEEL CONSTANTLY... THE DIFFICULTY I HAVE IN CONCENTRATING ON ANYTHING FOR MORE THAN A FEW MINUTES...
PERHAPS VAUGHN IS RIGHT. PERHAPS I AM A HOPELESS INCOMPETENT, AND YET...
LUNCHTIME THE NEXT DAY...
YEAH, SUE MENTIONED SOMETHING ABOUT HER DREAMS. THE WAY THEY SEEMED TO GO WITH MINE KINDA SPOOKED ME.
EXIT
YOU THINK THERE MAY BE SOMETHIN' TO IT?
I HONESTLY DO NOT KNOW, JOHNNY. DREAMS AND THEIR MEANINGS HAVE LONG BEEN THE SUBJECT OF MUCH RESEARCH, BUT THE INTERPRETATIONS HAVE VARIED SO MUCH AS TO BE INCONCLUSIVE.
STILL, I WOULDN'T HAVE THOUGHT SIS WOULD HAVE SCI-FI AN' MONSTER DREAMS. NOT WITHOUT A COUPLA BEN'S PIZZAS INSIDE HER, ANYWAY.
AN' YOU'LL FORGIVE ME FOR SAYING SO, REED, BUT BUILDING ROCKETS SEEMS OUT OF YOUR FIELD.
I QUITE AGREE. BUT THERE'S THAT FEELING...
HEY, DID I HEAR YOU GUYS TALKIN' ABOUT WEIRD DREAMS YOU BEEN HAVIN'?
WHY, YES, WE WERE, BEN. I...
OH, BEN... NOT YOU TOO?
'FRAID SO, PAL.
"ONLY MY DREAMS ARE KINDA... EMBARASSIN'! SEE, WE'RE ALL SOME KINDA SUPER HEROES!
"SUE'S AN INVISIBLE GIRL, JOHNNY'S A HUMAN TORCH, YOU'RE A FANTASTIC RUBBER GUY...
"AN' ME--I CAN PUNCH DOWN BUILDINGS WITH ONE HAND.


"ONLY -- ONLY THERE'S SOME STUFF EVEN STRANGER THAN THAT. ME AN' ALICIA AIN'T MARRIED IN MY DREAM.
"IN FACT, FER SOME REASON, I'M EVEN AFRAID TA ASK HER.
"AND... AND ALICIA IS... BLIND!"
I CAN'T MAKE NO SENSE OF IT.
IT'S DISTURBING. THE PARALLELS BETWEEN THE DIFFERENT DREAM SCENARIOS ARE SO EXACT, AND YET JUST DISSIMILAR ENOUGH.
JOHNNY'S DREAM HAS HIM BURNING UP IN THE COSMIC RAYS, SUE HAS HIM CATCHING FIRE. YOUR'S HAS HIM A HUMAN TORCH. YOUR STRENGTH IS COMMON TO YOURS AND SUE'S. MY STRETCHING ALSO.
IT'S CONFUSING, AND ANNOYING, I FEEL LIKE I SHOULD BE ABLE TO...
HEY, HEADS UP, GUYS. WE GOT COMPANY...
BEN, LOOK WHO'S COME TO JOIN US FOR LUNCH!
WELL, HEY, IF IT AIN'T MY FAVORITE FATHER-IN-LAW, HOW YA DOIN', PHIL?
VERY WELL, THANK YOU, BEN. I HOPE I'M NOT INTRUDING?
NOT A BIT. PULL UP A PEW AN' I'LL GETCHA A BURGER.
AND SO PHILLIP MASTERS JOINS THE OTHERS, AND TALK TURNS FROM THE STUFF OF DREAMS TO THE EVERYDAY GOINGS ON OF LIDDLE-VILLE.
BUT REED IS STILL TROUBLED...
AND HIS WORRIES HAVE NOT PASSED AN HOUR LATER WHEN HE RETURNS TO WORK...
RICHARDS, GOT A MOMENT?
HM? OH, SINGH. ER, YES, WHAT CAN I DO FOR YOU?
JUST WANTED TO SHOW YOU MY NEW TOY...
...A LESALLE-DEVANEY PARTICLE ACCELERATOR!


THE ONLY ONE IN THE STATE! I DON'T KNOW WHERE VINCENT VAUGHN KEEPS FINDING THE APPROPRIATIONS TO BUY SUCH EQUIPMENT, BUT I HOPE HE NEVER STOPS!
THIS IS MARVELOUS! IT HAS THE CAPABILITY OF RECREATING ANY FORM OF RADIATION, FROM SIMPLE SUNLIGHT TO THE MOST DEADLY WAVE-LENGTHS. WITH SOMETHING LIKE THIS I COULD...
YOU COULD DO NOTHING, RICHARDS!
PROFESSOR VAUGHN!
WELL, I'M GLAD YOU CAN REMEMBER MY NAME AT LEAST, SINCE YOU SEEM INCAPABLE OF REMEMBERING MY ORDERS!
I HAVE TOLD YOU REPEATEDLY THAT YOU ARE TOLERATED HERE ONLY BECAUSE OF YOUR MARGINAL PROFICIENCY IN YOUR FIELD.
I WILL NOT HAVE YOU TOYING WITH VALUABLE UNIVERSITY EQUIPMENT, IS THAT CLEAR?
Y-YES...
VERY WELL! YOU HAVE CLASSES THIS AFTERNOON. I SUGGEST YOU ATTEND TO THEM!
AS REED HEADS FOR HIS CLASSROOM...
EXCELLENT! THE KNOWLEDGE THAT SO DELICIOUS A MECHANISM AS THE ACCELERATOR IS AVAILABLE, BUT DENIED TO HIM WILL DRIVE RICHARDS INTO EVER GREATER DEPTHS OF DESPAIR AND CONFUSION.
MY PLAN IS WORKING PERFECTLY!
LATER THAT AFTERNOON, ALONE AFTER DISMISSING HIS CLASS, REED RICHARDS BROODS...
THERE MUST BE A WAY TO MAKE SENSE OF IT ALL.
HOMEWORK: CH. 1, 2, 3 F.U. DARWINISM MICRO-PHYSICS
BEN, JOHNNY, AND SUE COULD NOT NATURALLY HAVE SUCH SIMILAR DREAMS. AND YET IF SOME OUTSIDE FORCE IS CAUSING THEM, WHY HAVEN'T I BEEN AFFECTED?
I MIGHT ALMOST ACCEPT A KIND OF TELEPATHY BETWEEN SUE AND JOHNNY, AS BROTHER AND SISTER...
...BUT BEN IS OF NO BLOOD RELATION TO ANY OF US.
IF ONLY I COULD CON...CEN...TRA...
THE STRAIN OF SO LONG A SINGLE THOUGHT PROCESS SETS REED TO DOZING...


AND DREAMING...
THE NOW FAMILIAR ELEMENTS FLASH BEFORE HIS MIND'S EYE...
THE FOUR OF THEM ARE BOMBARDED BY THE MYSTERIOUS COSMIC RAYS.
BUT, IN THIS VERSION, THEIR ROCKET DOES NOT EXPLODE.
INSTEAD, THEY SURVIVE --AND ARE REBORN...
...AS THE FANTASTIC FOUR!
REED'S DREAM SUPPLIES DETAILS MISSING FROM THOSE OF THE OTHERS.
HE SEES THEIR HEADQUARTERS ATOP THE BAXTER BUILDING...
...NOT IN LIDDLEVILLE, BUT IN THE HEART OF MANHATTAN.
HE SEES A TYPICAL DAY IN THE LIFE OF THE FABULOUS FOURSOME DRAMATICALLY INTERRUPTED...
A STRANGE, AND FAMILIAR POWER SEIZES CONTROL OF THEIR MINDS...
ROBOT-LIKE, THEY ARE MARCHED THROUGH THE FIVE LEVELS OF THEIR HEADQUARTERS, UP TO THE HANGAR DECK.
TAKING THEIR FANTASTICAR, THEY FLY NORTH AND WEST, ACROSS NEW YORK STATE, INTO THE ADIRONDAK MOUNTAINS.
THERE, A JARRING ANACHRONISM CONFRONTS THEM: A MEDIEVEL CASTLE RISES FROM THE FOREST.
AND, INSIDE, THE MAN THEY HAVE COME TO THINK OF AS BEN GRIMM'S KINDLY FATHER-IN-LAW.
A MAN WITH ANOTHER NAME... THE PUPPET MASTER!
AND WITH HIM, ONE OTHER...

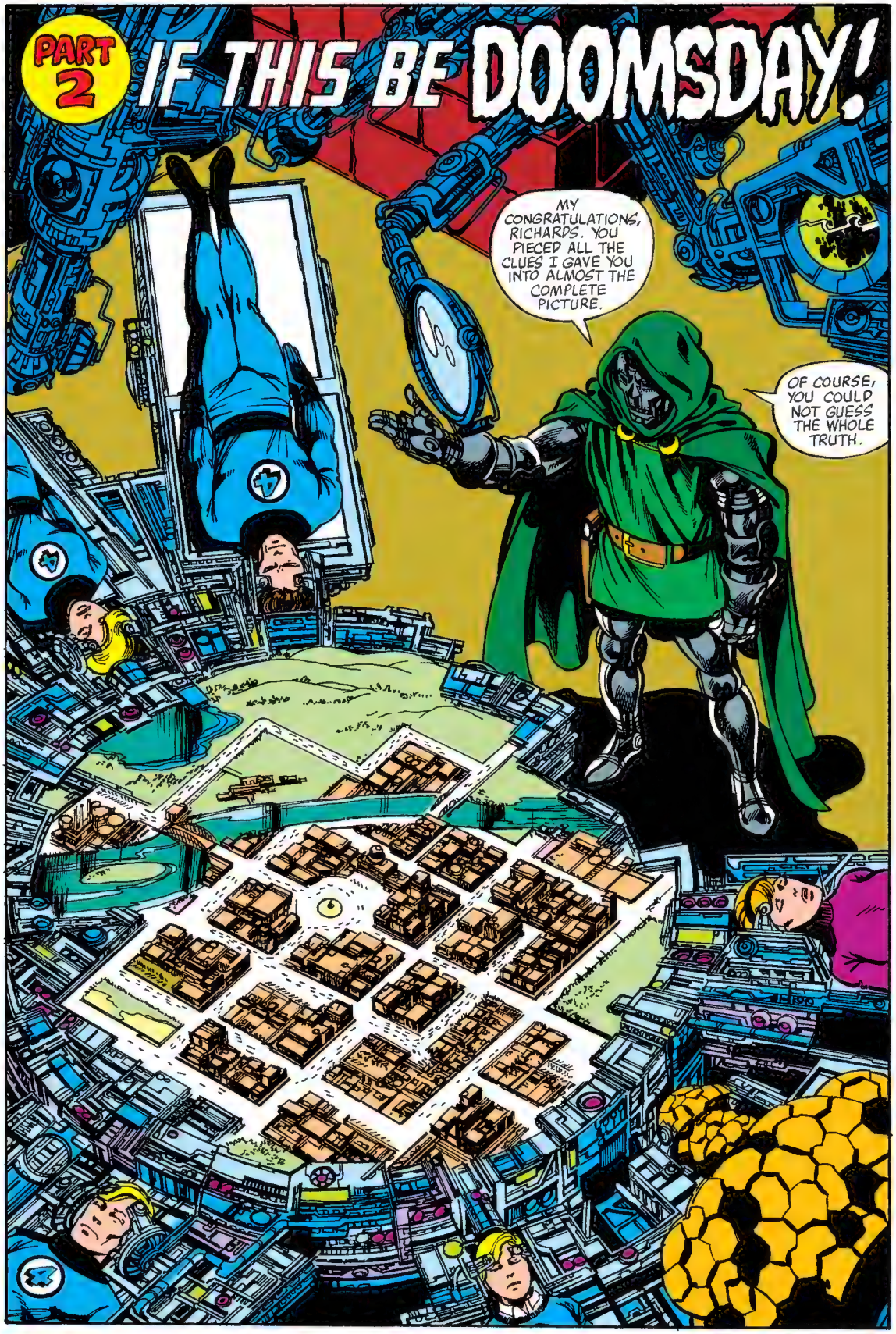

AT THAT MOMENT, THE DREAM IS RUDELY ENDED...
WHUD
CRASH!
MY HEAD... RINGING LIKE A GONG... THAT WILL TEACH ME TO FALL ASLEEP WHEN...
MY HEAD!
SUDDENLY MY THOUGHTS DON'T SEEM MUDDLED. SUDDENLY EVERYTHING IS CLEAR!
MY DREAM--IT WAS TRUE! I KNOW IT WAS! WE ARE THE FANTASTIC FOUR! AND SOMEHOW THE PUPPET MASTER ENSNARED US--STRIPPED US OF OUR POWERS!
BUT HOW? OUR VERY MOLECULAR STRUCTURE WAS ALTERED. HOW COULD HE REMOVE OUR POWERS...
UNLESS...
GRIM RESOLUTION FIXED ON HIS FEATURES, REED RICHARDS STRIDES THROUGH THE DESERTED HALLS OF THE UNIVERSITY.
IT IS IMPOSSIBLE THAT SOMEONE WITH THE LIMITED INTELLECT OF THE PUPPET MASTER COULD HAVE FOUND AN ANTIDOTE TO OUR POWERS.
I'VE SPENT YEARS TRYING TO CURE BEN OF BEING THE THING. WHERE I FAILED THE PUPPET MASTER COULD NOT HAVE SUCCEEDED!
FINALLY, IN THE BIOLOGY LAB...
THEREFORE, HE MUST HAVE FOUND A WAY TO CREATE THE ILLUSION OF OUR POWERS BEING GONE...
FROG
YES, THIS SCALPEL IS JUST WHAT I NEED...
MINUTES LATER, IN REED'S OFFICE...
I'M TAKING A GAMBLE HERE. I SHOULD PROBABLY CALL SUE, IN CASE SOMETHING GOES WRONG.
BUT THEN I WOULD HAVE THE PROBLEM OF CONVINCING HER OF WHAT I BELIEVE TO BE TRUE...
AND, CONDITIONED AS SHE IS TO BELIEVE THAT LIFE IN "LIDDLEVILLE" IS THE NORM, HOW COULD I EXPECT HER TO ACCEPT MY THEORY...
THAT SOMEHOW OUR PERSONALITIES HAVE BEEN TRANSFERRED INTO ROBOT BODIES...
I CAN ONLY PROVE THAT BY HARD EVIDENCE... THE EVIDENCE OF WHAT MUST LIE JUST BELOW THIS ARTIFICIAL "SKIN".
HE PLUNGES THE BLADE DEEP...
...AND SCREAMS!
A SEARING BOLT OF BLINDING PAIN LANCES INTO REED RICHARDS' BRAIN, AND HE COLLAPSES, UNCONSCIOUS, ON THE COLD TILES...
...AS A POOL OF RED LIQUID BEGINS TO COLLECT BENEATH HIS ARM...

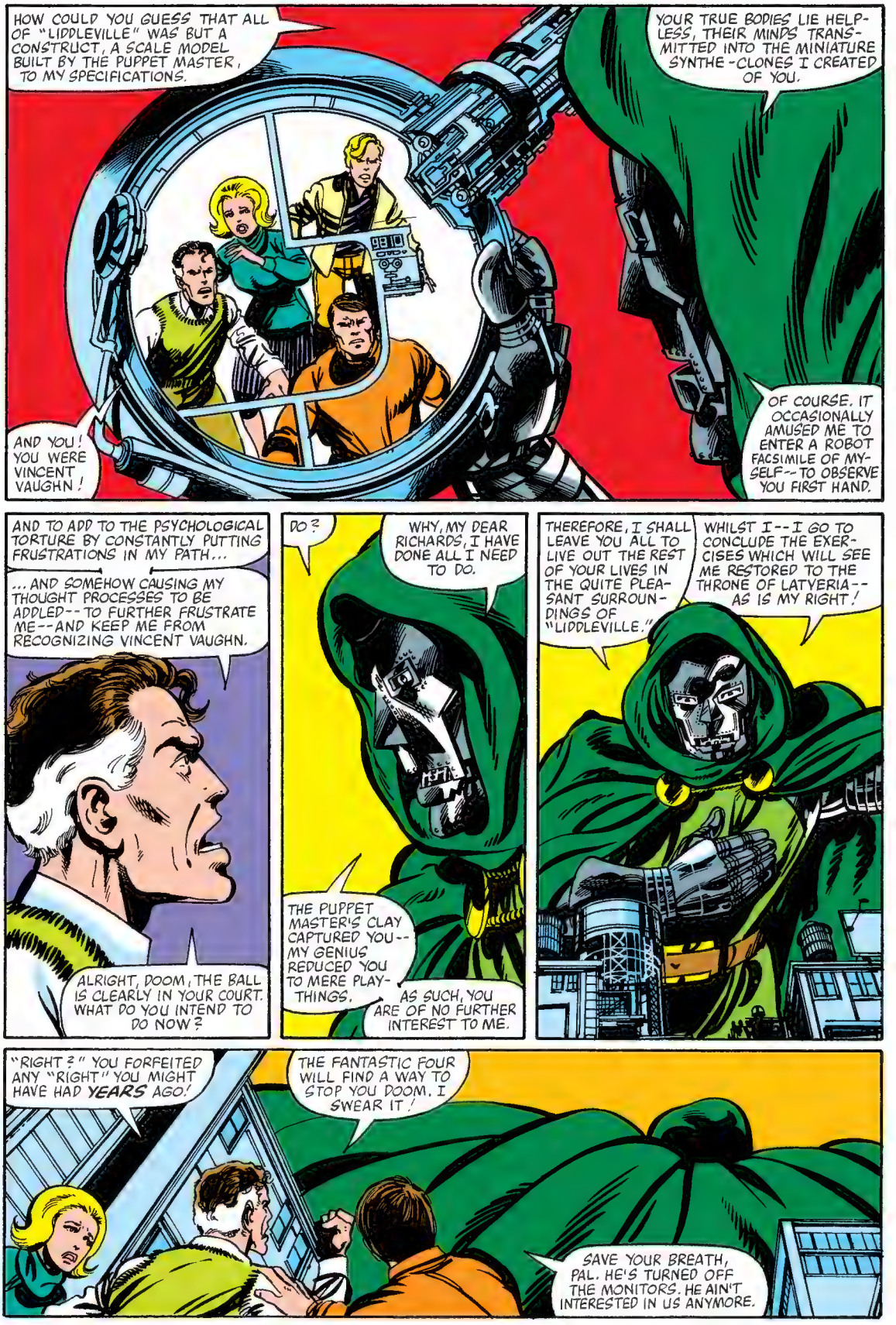

AN HOUR LATER, AT THE RICHARDS' HOME...
DON'T WORRY, SUZIE. REED'S PROBABLY JUST GIVIN' A LITTLE AFTER-HOURS COACHIN' TO SOME CUTE CO-ED.
THAT'S HARDLY VERY FUNNY, BEN. I CAN'T UNDERSTAND WHY REED IS SO LATE.
HEY, UNCA JOHNNY, I'M FLYIN'!
YER A REG'LAR SUPER HERO, FRANKLIN.
I'M SORRY, SUSAN. I WOULD HAVE CALLED, BUT I WAS AFRAID THE TELEPHONE LINES MIGHT BE MONITORED.
REED!
YOU LOOK LIKE DEATH! GOOD HEAVENS... YOUR SLEEVE! IT'S SOAKED WITH BLOOD!
NOT BLOOD, SUE! BUT SOMETHING VERY MUCH LIKE IT!
YOU MUST ALL LISTEN TO ME VERY CAREFULLY...
SLOWLY, ALMOST HALTINGLY, REED RICHARDS RECOUNTS HIS INCREDIBLE STORY...
THE DREAMS YOU HAVE BEEN HAVING WERE MOSTLY TRUE. THEY WERE FRAGMENTS OF MEMORIES DISTORTED BY THE CONDITIONING THAT MADE LIFE HERE SEEM REAL.
WE DO HAVE FANTASTIC POWERS, JUST AS YOU DREAMED. WE GAINED THEM IN A FLIGHT INTO SPACE. WE HAVE USED THEM IN THE SERVICE OF HUMANITY FOR MANY YEARS. BUT IN DOING SO WE HAVE MADE MANY POWERFUL ENEMIES. ONE OF THEM IS CALLED THE PUPPET MASTER.
HE IS IN REALITY PHILLIP MASTERS. I'M SORRY, ALICIA. I REALIZE THIS MUST BE PAINFUL FOR YOU, BUT MASTERS HAS SOMEHOW IMPRISONED US IN THESE ARTIFICIAL BODIES.
B-BEN... HE CAN'T POSSIBLY MEAN IT?
OH, REED, PLEASE DON'T SAY ANY MORE! YOU'VE BEEN UNDER A TERRIFIC STRAIN. SOMEHOW THIS INJURY TO YOUR ARM HAS... UNHINGED YOUR MIND!
SIS IS RIGHT, REED! YOU GOTTA LET US GET YOU TO THE HOSPITAL, REAL FAST!
YEAH--YOU'RE ALL SHOCKY FROM LOSS OF BLOOD, PAL. YOU'RE HALLUCINATIN'. LET US HELP YOU.
YOU DON'T BELIEVE ME...
...BUT YOU WILL! OUR VERY LIVES MAY DEPEND ON IT!
I WILL MAKE YOU BELIEVE ME!

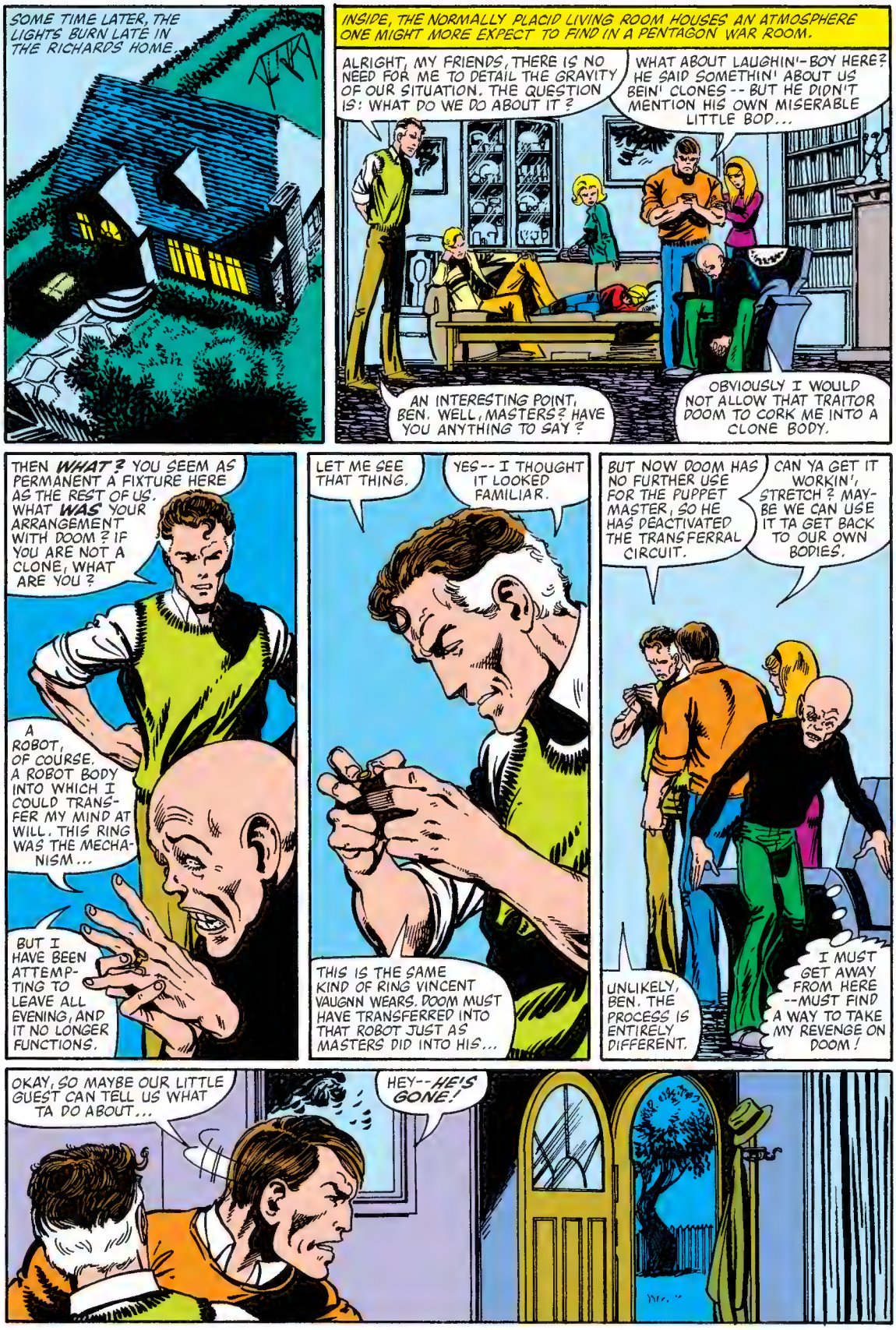
IT HAS BEEN A DAY OF CONTENTMENT FOR PHILLIP MASTERS, PUTTERING ABOUT HIS SMALL TOY SHOP.
NOW HE LOOKS FORWARD TO DROPPING IN ON HIS STEP-DAUGHTER AND SON-IN-LAW.
SCREEEECH!
HIS PLANS ARE ABOUT TO GO ASTRAY...
OH, HELLO. WHAT ARE YOU DOING...
WHAM!
GRAB 'EM BARRE!
OKAY, YOU MOTHERLESS SUNNUVA...
WHAT HAVE YOU DONE TO US?
BE CAREFUL, BEN! DON'T HURT HIM!
HURT HIM? HURT HIM? I'M GONNA BUST HIM INTA LITTLE BITTY PIECES IF HE DON'T START TALKIN'... FAST!
ALRIGHT! YOU NEED RESORT TO NO FURTHER VIOLENCE! IF YOU HAVE SEEN THROUGH THE CHARADE THERE IS NO POINT IN MY CONTINUED PLAY ACTING.
OBVIOUSLY YOU HAVE FOUND OUT THAT NONE OF THIS IS REAL. THE TOWN IS A SHAM, THE OTHER PEOPLE ARE ROBOTS. ALL THIS IS A PRODUCT OF MY GENIUS.
AND YOU ...YOU FOUR, ALICIA AND THE CHILD... ARE SYNTHE-CLONES.
PUPPETS!
BUT -- WHY, FATHER? WHY?
I WANTED TO GIVE YOU WHAT YOU MOST DESIRED -- A NORMAL LIFE WITH THE MAN YOU HAVE CHOSEN TO LOVE... WITH BEN GRIMM.
I DID IT ALL FOR YOU, ALICIA...
WAIT A MINUTE -- YOU COULD CONCEIVE OF SUCH A PLOT, BUT YOU HAVEN'T THE TECHNOLOGY TO IMPLEMENT IT...
OF COURSE NOT. SO I MADE A PUPPET FROM MY MIND-CONTROLLING RADIOACTIVE CLAY. A PUPPET OF SOMEONE WHO COULD HELP ME.
WHO?
SURELY, REED RICHARDS, THAT IS NOT SO DIFFICULT TO DEDUCE?
REED! THAT VOICE...!

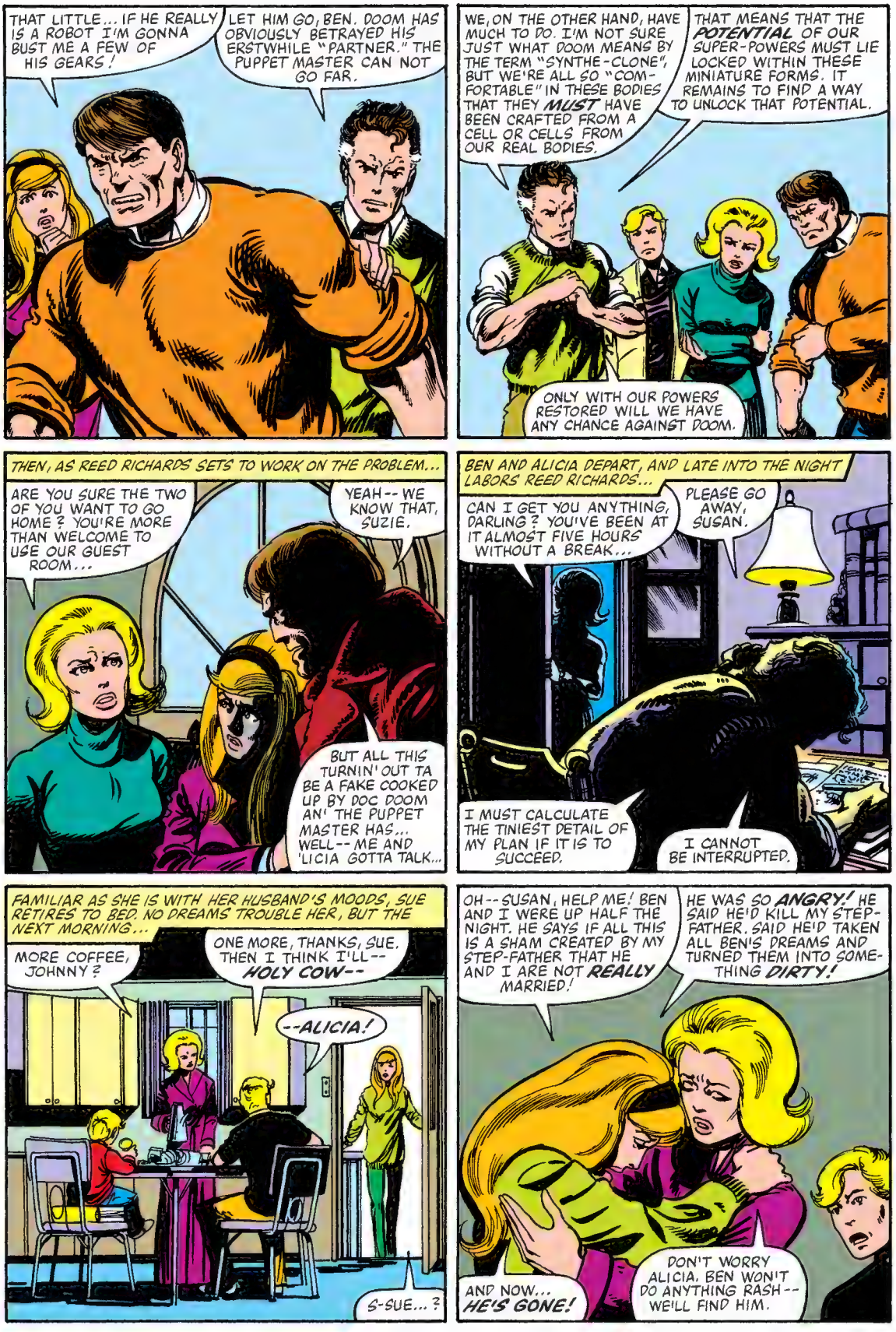
WHO ELSE COULD HAVE TAKEN THE CHILDISH PLOT OF PHILLIP MASTERS' AND CRAFTED IT INTO THE PERFECT VENGEANCE AGAINST HIS MOST HATED ENEMIES?

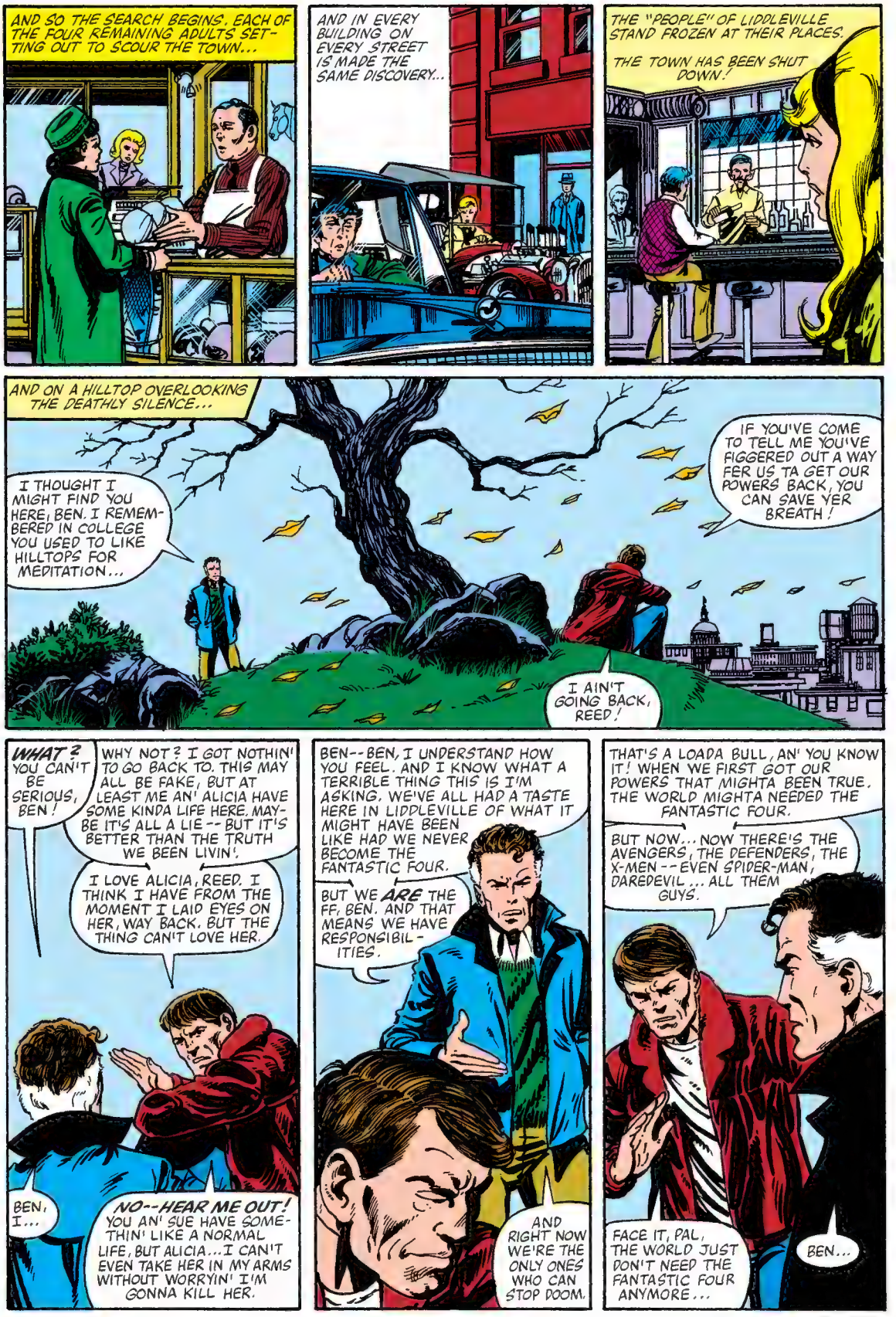
WHO BUT... DOCTOR DOOM?

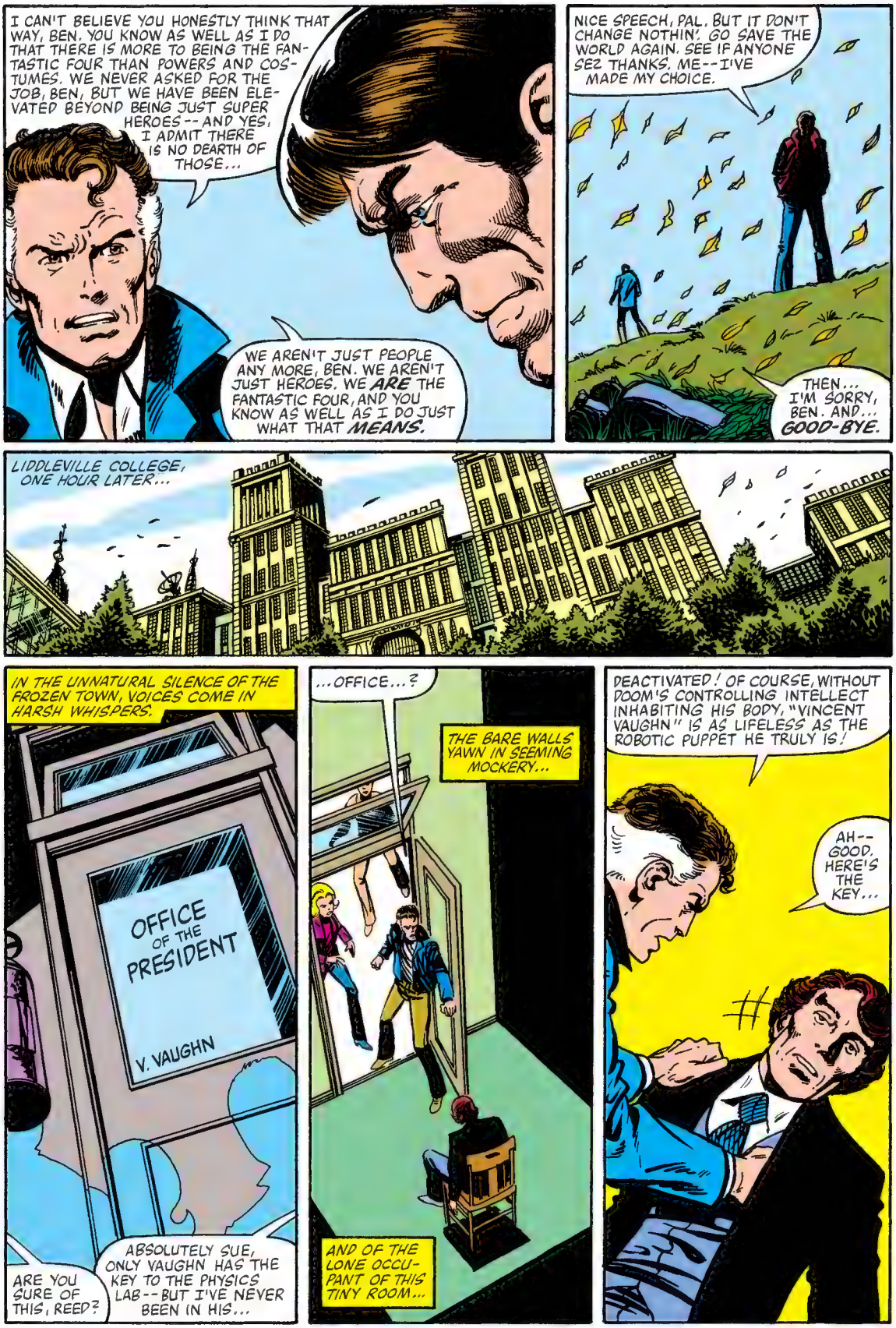

PART 2
IF THIS BE DOOMSDAY!
MY CONGRATULATIONS, RICHARDS. YOU PIECED ALL THE CLUES I GAVE YOU INTO ALMOST THE COMPLETE PICTURE.
OF COURSE, YOU COULD NOT GUESS THE WHOLE TRUTH.

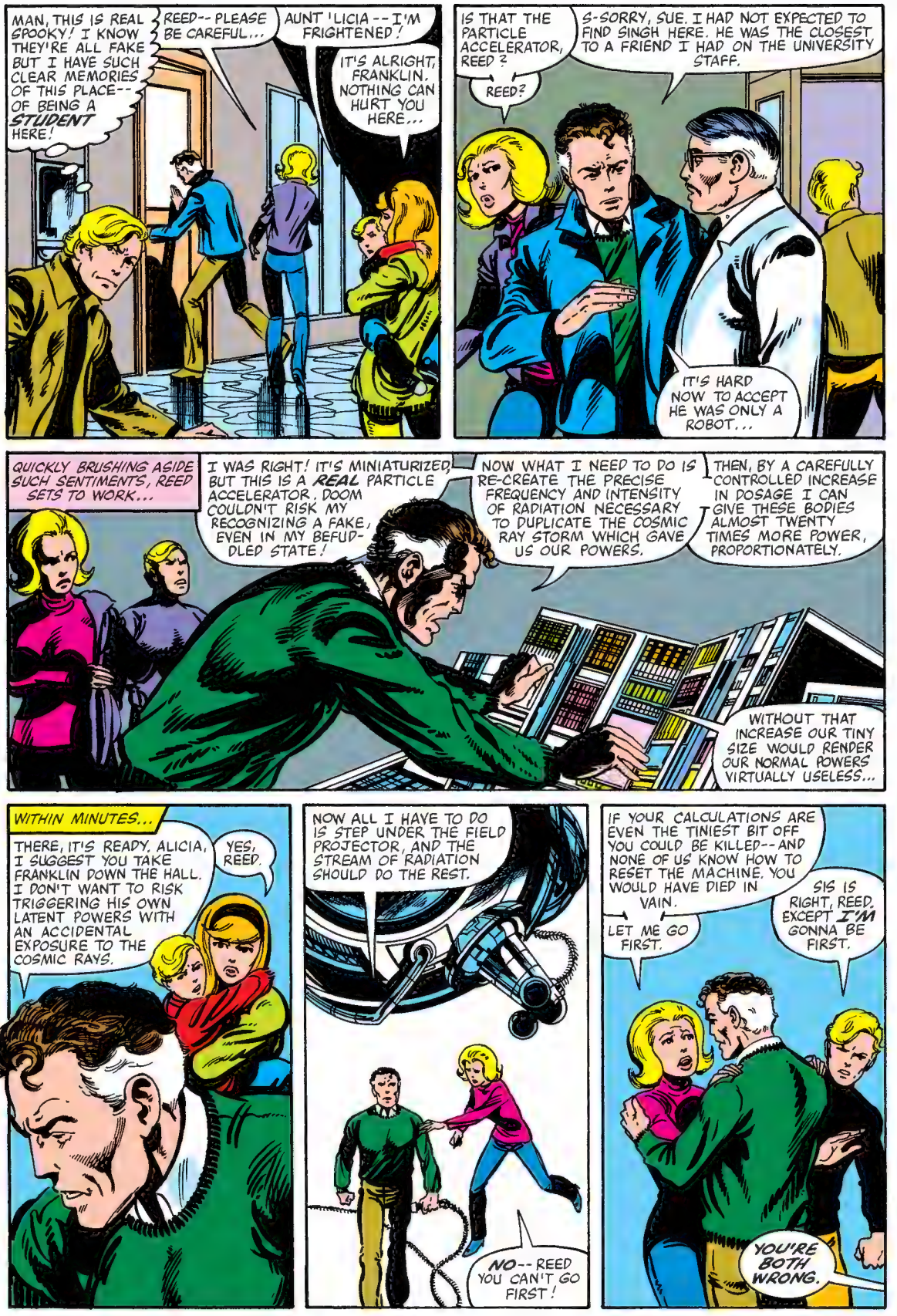

HOW COULD YOU GUESS THAT ALL OF "LIDDLEVILLE" WAS BUT A CONSTRUCT, A SCALE MODEL BUILT BY THE PUPPET MASTER, TO MY SPECIFICATIONS.
YOUR TRUE BODIES LIE HELPLESS, THEIR MINDS TRANSMITTED INTO THE MINIATURE SYNTHE-CLONES I CREATED OF YOU.
AND YOU! YOU WERE VINCENT VAUGHN!
OF COURSE. IT OCCASIONALLY AMUSED ME TO ENTER A ROBOT FACSIMILE OF MYSELF--TO OBSERVE YOU FIRST HAND.
AND TO ADD TO THE PSYCHOLOGICAL TORTURE BY CONSTANTLY PUTTING FRUSTRATIONS IN MY PATH...
...AND SOMEHOW CAUSING MY THOUGHT PROCESSES TO BE ADDLED--TO FURTHER FRUSTRATE ME--AND KEEP ME FROM RECOGNIZING VINCENT VAUGHN.
ALRIGHT, DOOM, THE BALL IS CLEARLY IN YOUR COURT. WHAT DO YOU INTEND TO DO NOW?
DO?
WHY, MY DEAR RICHARDS, I HAVE DONE ALL I NEED TO DO.
THE PUPPET MASTER'S CLAY CAPTURED YOU--MY GENIUS REDUCED YOU TO MERE PLAYTHINGS.
AS SUCH, YOU ARE OF NO FURTHER INTEREST TO ME.
THEREFORE, I SHALL LEAVE YOU ALL TO LIVE OUT THE REST OF YOUR LIVES IN THE QUITE PLEASANT SURROUNDINGS OF "LIDDLEVILLE."
WHILST I--I GO TO CONCLUDE THE EXERCISES WHICH WILL SEE ME RESTORED TO THE THRONE OF LATVERIA--AS IS MY RIGHT!
"RIGHT?" YOU FORFEITED ANY "RIGHT" YOU MIGHT HAVE HAD *YEARS* AGO!
THE FANTASTIC FOUR WILL FIND A WAY TO STOP YOU DOOM. I SWEAR IT!
SAVE YOUR BREATH, PAL. HE'S TURNED OFF THE MONITORS. HE AIN'T INTERESTED IN US ANYMORE.


SOME TIME LATER, THE LIGHTS BURN LATE IN THE RICHARDS HOME.
INSIDE, THE NORMALLY PLACID LIVING ROOM HOUSES AN ATMOSPHERE ONE MIGHT MORE EXPECT TO FIND IN A PENTAGON WAR ROOM.
ALRIGHT, MY FRIENDS, THERE IS NO NEED FOR ME TO DETAIL THE GRAVITY OF OUR SITUATION. THE QUESTION IS: WHAT DO WE DO ABOUT IT?
WHAT ABOUT LAUGHIN'-BOY HERE? HE SAID SOMETHIN' ABOUT US BEIN' CLONES -- BUT HE DIDN'T MENTION HIS OWN MISERABLE LITTLE BOD...
AN INTERESTING POINT, BEN. WELL, MASTERS? HAVE YOU ANYTHING TO SAY?
OBVIOUSLY I WOULD NOT ALLOW THAT TRAITOR DOOM TO CORK ME INTO A CLONE BODY.
THEN WHAT? YOU SEEM AS PERMANENT A FIXTURE HERE AS THE REST OF US. WHAT WAS YOUR ARRANGEMENT WITH DOOM? IF YOU ARE NOT A CLONE, WHAT ARE YOU?
A ROBOT, OF COURSE. A ROBOT BODY INTO WHICH I COULD TRANSFER MY MIND AT WILL. THIS RING WAS THE MECHANISM...
BUT I HAVE BEEN ATTEMPTING TO LEAVE ALL EVENING, AND IT NO LONGER FUNCTIONS.
LET ME SEE THAT THING.
YES -- I THOUGHT IT LOOKED FAMILIAR.
THIS IS THE SAME KIND OF RING VINCENT VAUGNN WEARS. DOOM MUST HAVE TRANSFERRED INTO THAT ROBOT JUST AS MASTERS DID INTO HIS...
BUT NOW DOOM HAS NO FURTHER USE FOR THE PUPPET MASTER, SO HE HAS DEACTIVATED THE TRANSFERRAL CIRCUIT.
CAN YA GET IT WORKIN', STRETCH? MAYBE WE CAN USE IT TA GET BACK TO OUR OWN BODIES.
UNLIKELY, BEN. THE PROCESS IS ENTIRELY DIFFERENT.
I MUST GET AWAY FROM HERE --MUST FIND A WAY TO TAKE MY REVENGE ON DOOM!
OKAY, SO MAYBE OUR LITTLE GUEST CAN TELL US WHAT TA DO ABOUT...
HEY--HE'S GONE!

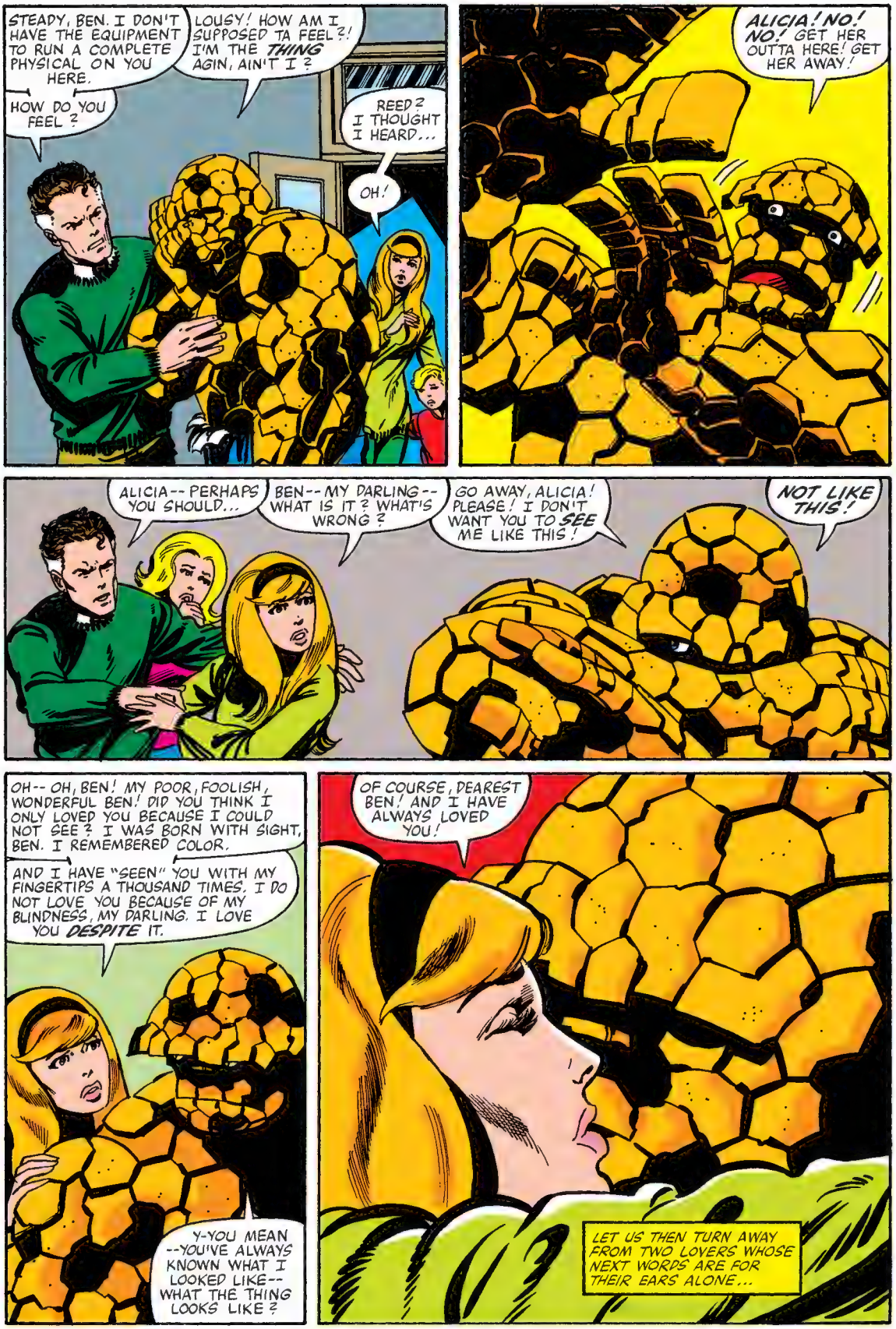

THAT LITTLE... IF HE REALLY IS A ROBOT I'M GONNA BUST ME A FEW OF HIS GEARS!
LET HIM GO, BEN. DOOM HAS OBVIOUSLY BETRAYED HIS ERSTWHILE "PARTNER." THE PUPPET MASTER CAN NOT GO FAR.
WE, ON THE OTHER HAND, HAVE MUCH TO DO. I'M NOT SURE JUST WHAT DOOM MEANS BY THE TERM "SYNTHE-CLONE", BUT WE'RE ALL SO "COMFORTABLE" IN THESE BODIES THAT THEY MUST HAVE BEEN CRAFTED FROM A CELL OR CELLS FROM OUR REAL BODIES.
THAT MEANS THAT THE POTENTIAL OF OUR SUPER-POWERS MUST LIE LOCKED WITHIN THESE MINIATURE FORMS. IT REMAINS TO FIND A WAY TO UNLOCK THAT POTENTIAL.
ONLY WITH OUR POWERS RESTORED WILL WE HAVE ANY CHANCE AGAINST DOOM.
THEN, AS REED RICHARDS SETS TO WORK ON THE PROBLEM...
ARE YOU SURE THE TWO OF YOU WANT TO GO HOME? YOU'RE MORE THAN WELCOME TO USE OUR GUEST ROOM...
YEAH-- WE KNOW THAT, SUZIE.
BUT ALL THIS TURNIN' OUT TA BE A FAKE COOKED UP BY DOC DOOM AN' THE PUPPET MASTER HAS... WELL-- ME AND 'LICIA GOTTA TALK...
BEN AND ALICIA DEPART, AND LATE INTO THE NIGHT LABORS REED RICHARDS...
CAN I GET YOU ANYTHING, DARLING? YOU'VE BEEN AT IT ALMOST FIVE HOURS WITHOUT A BREAK...
PLEASE GO AWAY, SUSAN.
I MUST CALCULATE THE TINIEST DETAIL OF MY PLAN IF IT IS TO SUCCEED.
I CANNOT BE INTERRUPTED.
FAMILIAR AS SHE IS WITH HER HUSBAND'S MOODS, SUE RETIRES TO BED. NO DREAMS TROUBLE HER, BUT THE NEXT MORNING...
MORE COFFEE, JOHNNY?
ONE MORE, THANKS, SUE. THEN I THINK I'LL-- HOLY COW--
--ALICIA!
S-SUE...?
OH-- SUSAN, HELP ME! BEN AND I WERE UP HALF THE NIGHT. HE SAYS IF ALL THIS IS A SHAM CREATED BY MY STEP-FATHER THAT HE AND I ARE NOT REALLY MARRIED!
HE WAS SO ANGRY! HE SAID HE'D KILL MY STEP-FATHER. SAID HE'D TAKEN ALL BEN'S DREAMS AND TURNED THEM INTO SOMETHING DIRTY!
AND NOW... HE'S GONE!
DON'T WORRY ALICIA. BEN WON'T DO ANYTHING RASH-- WE'LL FIND HIM.

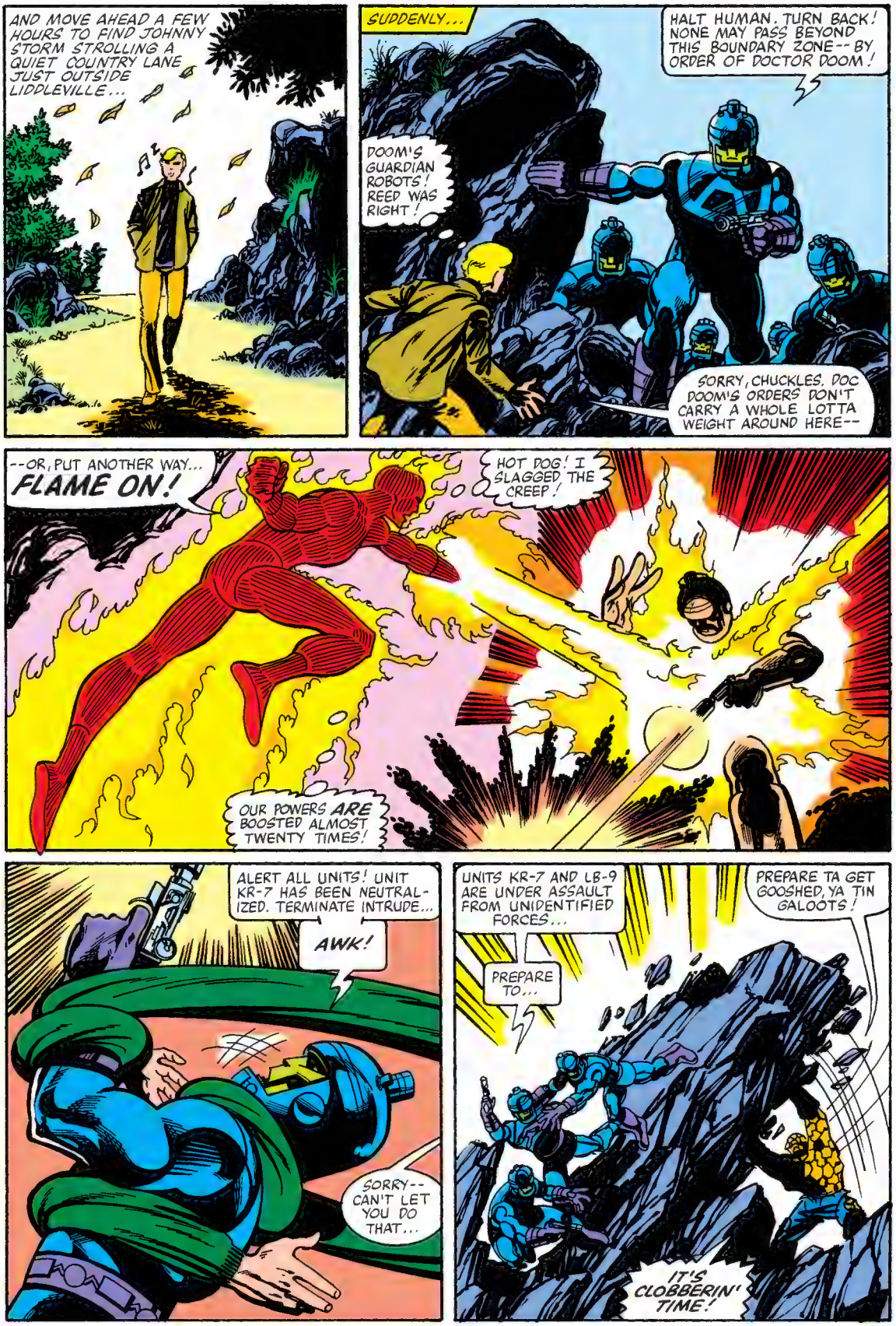

AND SO THE SEARCH BEGINS, EACH OF THE FOUR REMAINING ADULTS SETTING OUT TO SCOUR THE TOWN...
AND IN EVERY BUILDING ON EVERY STREET IS MADE THE SAME DISCOVERY...
THE "PEOPLE" OF LIDDLEVILLE STAND FROZEN AT THEIR PLACES.
THE TOWN HAS BEEN SHUT DOWN!
AND ON A HILLTOP OVERLOOKING THE DEATHLY SILENCE...
I THOUGHT I MIGHT FIND YOU HERE, BEN. I REMEMBERED IN COLLEGE YOU USED TO LIKE HILLTOPS FOR MEDITATION...
IF YOU'VE COME TO TELL ME YOU'VE FIGGERED OUT A WAY FER US TA GET OUR POWERS BACK, YOU CAN SAVE YER BREATH!
I AIN'T GOING BACK, REED!
WHAT? YOU CAN'T BE SERIOUS, BEN!
WHY NOT? I GOT NOTHIN' TO GO BACK TO. THIS MAY ALL BE FAKE, BUT AT LEAST ME AN' ALICIA HAVE SOME KINDA LIFE HERE. MAYBE IT'S ALL A LIE -- BUT IT'S BETTER THAN THE TRUTH WE BEEN LIVIN'.
I LOVE ALICIA, REED. I THINK I HAVE FROM THE MOMENT I LAID EYES ON HER, WAY BACK. BUT THE THING CAN'T LOVE HER.
BEN, I...
NO--HEAR ME OUT! YOU AN' SUE HAVE SOMETHIN' LIKE A NORMAL LIFE, BUT ALICIA...I CAN'T EVEN TAKE HER IN MY ARMS WITHOUT WORRYIN' I'M GONNA KILL HER.
BEN--BEN, I UNDERSTAND HOW YOU FEEL. AND I KNOW WHAT A TERRIBLE THING THIS IS I'M ASKING. WE'VE ALL HAD A TASTE HERE IN LIDDLEVILLE OF WHAT IT MIGHT HAVE BEEN LIKE HAD WE NEVER BECOME THE FANTASTIC FOUR.
BUT WE ARE THE FF, BEN. AND THAT MEANS WE HAVE RESPONSIBILITIES.
AND RIGHT NOW WE'RE THE ONLY ONES WHO CAN STOP DOOM.
THAT'S A LOADA BULL, AN' YOU KNOW IT! WHEN WE FIRST GOT OUR POWERS THAT MIGHTA BEEN TRUE. THE WORLD MIGHTA NEEDED THE FANTASTIC FOUR.
BUT NOW... NOW THERE'S THE AVENGERS, THE DEFENDERS, THE X-MEN -- EVEN SPIDER-MAN, DAREDEVIL... ALL THEM GUYS.
FACE IT, PAL, THE WORLD JUST DON'T NEED THE FANTASTIC FOUR ANYMORE...
BEN...

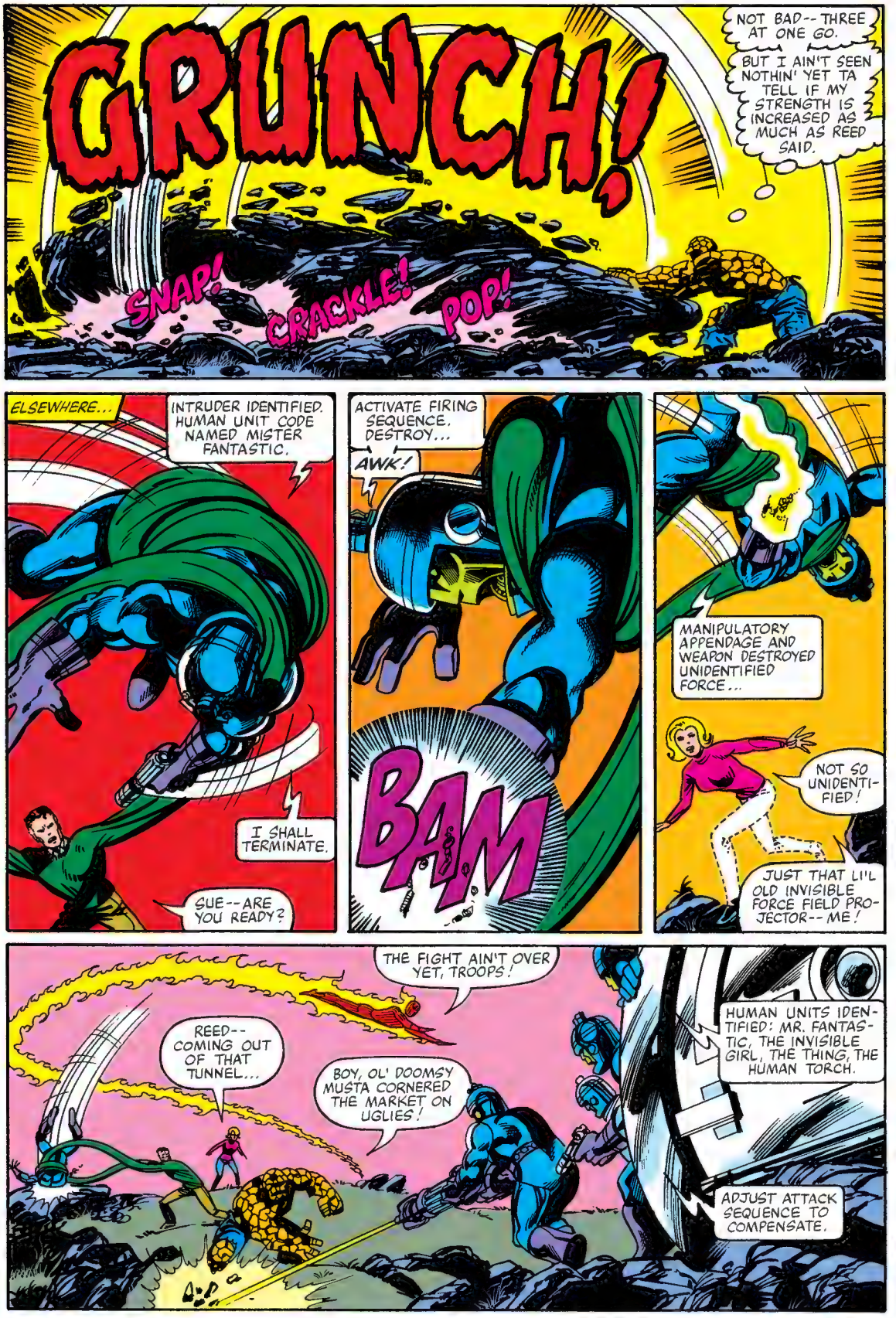

I CAN'T BELIEVE YOU HONESTLY THINK THAT WAY, BEN. YOU KNOW AS WELL AS I DO THAT THERE IS MORE TO BEING THE FANTASTIC FOUR THAN POWERS AND COSTUMES. WE NEVER ASKED FOR THE JOB, BEN, BUT WE HAVE BEEN ELEVATED BEYOND BEING JUST SUPER HEROES -- AND YES, I ADMIT THERE IS NO DEARTH OF THOSE...
WE AREN'T JUST PEOPLE ANY MORE, BEN. WE AREN'T JUST HEROES. WE ARE THE FANTASTIC FOUR, AND YOU KNOW AS WELL AS I DO JUST WHAT THAT MEANS.
NICE SPEECH, PAL. BUT IT DON'T CHANGE NOTHIN'. GO SAVE THE WORLD AGAIN. SEE IF ANYONE SEZ THANKS. ME -- I'VE MADE MY CHOICE.
THEN... I'M SORRY, BEN. AND... GOOD-BYE.
LIDDLEVILLE COLLEGE, ONE HOUR LATER...
IN THE UNNATURAL SILENCE OF THE FROZEN TOWN, VOICES COME IN HARSH WHISPERS.
OFFICE OF THE PRESIDENT
V. VAUGHN
ARE YOU SURE OF THIS, REED?
ABSOLUTELY SUE, ONLY VAUGHN HAS THE KEY TO THE PHYSICS LAB -- BUT I'VE NEVER BEEN IN HIS...
...OFFICE...?
THE BARE WALLS YAWN IN SEEMING MOCKERY...
AND OF THE LONE OCCUPANT OF THIS TINY ROOM...
DEACTIVATED! OF COURSE, WITHOUT DOOM'S CONTROLLING INTELLECT INHABITING HIS BODY, "VINCENT VAUGHN" IS AS LIFELESS AS THE ROBOTIC PUPPET HE TRULY IS!
AH -- GOOD. HERE'S THE KEY...

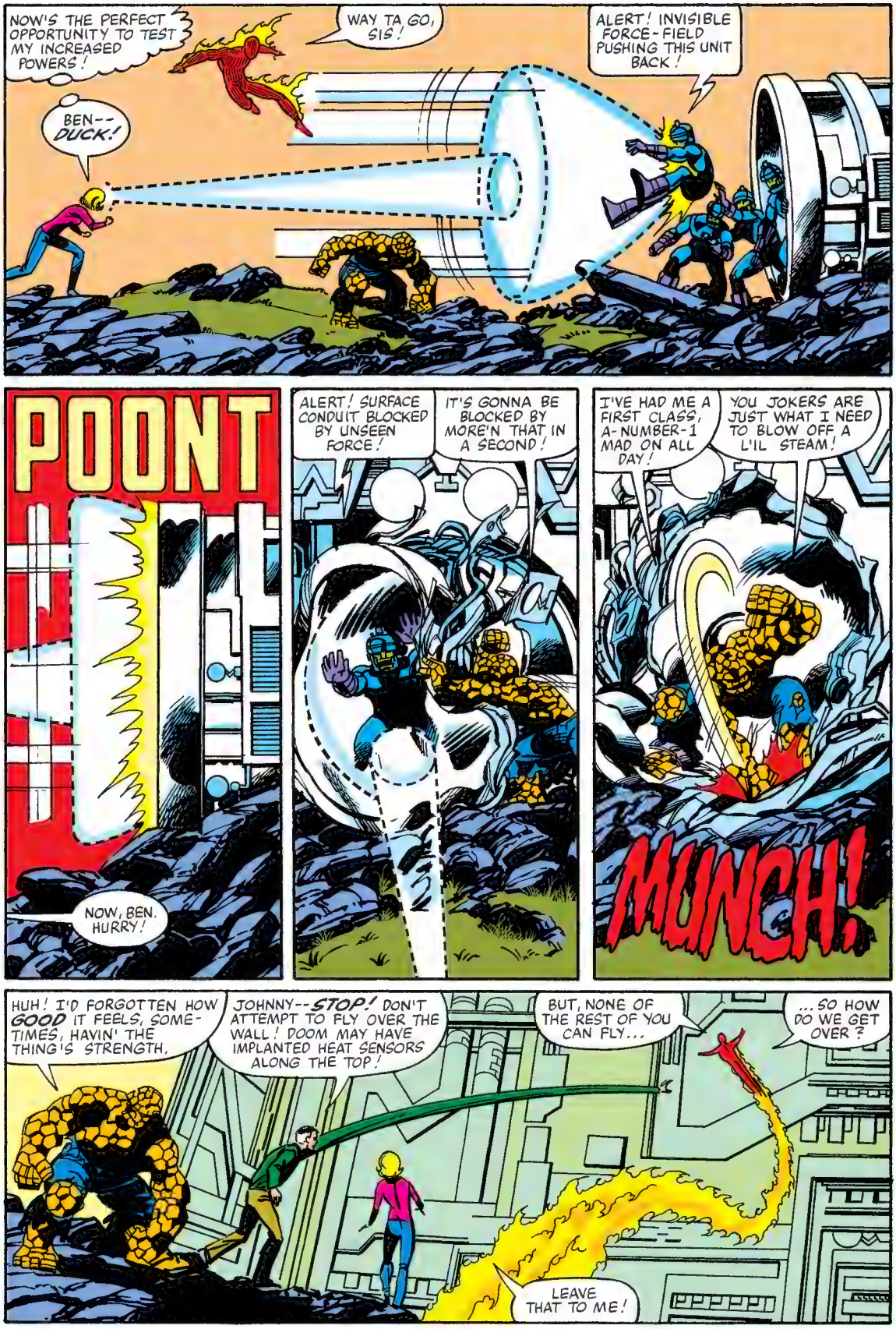

MAN, THIS IS REAL SPOOKY! I KNOW THEY'RE ALL FAKE BUT I HAVE SUCH CLEAR MEMORIES OF THIS PLACE-- OF BEING A STUDENT HERE!
REED-- PLEASE BE CAREFUL...
AUNT 'LICIA -- I'M FRIGHTENED!
IT'S ALRIGHT, FRANKLIN. NOTHING CAN HURT YOU HERE...
IS THAT THE PARTICLE ACCELERATOR, REED?
REED?
S-SORRY, SUE. I HAD NOT EXPECTED TO FIND SINGH HERE. HE WAS THE CLOSEST TO A FRIEND I HAD ON THE UNIVERSITY STAFF.
IT'S HARD NOW TO ACCEPT HE WAS ONLY A ROBOT...
QUICKLY BRUSHING ASIDE SUCH SENTIMENTS, REED SETS TO WORK...
I WAS RIGHT! IT'S MINIATURIZED, BUT THIS IS A REAL PARTICLE ACCELERATOR. DOOM COULDN'T RISK MY RECOGNIZING A FAKE, EVEN IN MY BEFUDDLED STATE!
NOW WHAT I NEED TO DO IS RE-CREATE THE PRECISE FREQUENCY AND INTENSITY OF RADIATION NECESSARY TO DUPLICATE THE COSMIC RAY STORM WHICH GAVE US OUR POWERS.
THEN, BY A CAREFULLY CONTROLLED INCREASE IN DOSAGE I CAN GIVE THESE BODIES ALMOST TWENTY TIMES MORE POWER, PROPORTIONATELY.
WITHOUT THAT INCREASE OUR TINY SIZE WOULD RENDER OUR NORMAL POWERS VIRTUALLY USELESS...
WITHIN MINUTES...
THERE, IT'S READY, ALICIA. I SUGGEST YOU TAKE FRANKLIN DOWN THE HALL. I DON'T WANT TO RISK TRIGGERING HIS OWN LATENT POWERS WITH AN ACCIDENTAL EXPOSURE TO THE COSMIC RAYS.
YES, REED.
NOW ALL I HAVE TO DO IS STEP UNDER THE FIELD PROJECTOR, AND THE STREAM OF RADIATION SHOULD DO THE REST.
NO-- REED YOU CAN'T GO FIRST!
IF YOUR CALCULATIONS ARE EVEN THE TINIEST BIT OFF YOU COULD BE KILLED-- AND NONE OF US KNOW HOW TO RESET THE MACHINE. YOU WOULD HAVE DIED IN VAIN.
LET ME GO FIRST.
SIS IS RIGHT, REED. EXCEPT I'M GONNA BE FIRST.
YOU'RE BOTH WRONG.

I'LL GO FIRST!
BEN!
BEN--OLD FRIEND--I KNEW YOU WOULDN'T LET US DOWN--LET THE WORLD DOWN...
CAN IT, RICHARDS. JUST DON'T SAY A BLASTED WORD. LET'S JUST GET THIS OVER WITH.
RADIATION COUNT IS SET TO REQUIRED ACCELERATION, BEN... ARE YOU CERTAIN...
NO!
SO DO IT!
IT BEGINS.
AS THEY DID SO MANY YEARS BEFORE, THE RAYS PENETRATE BEN GRIMM'S BODY...
UNGH! I CAN FEEL IT... FEEL THE CHANGE BEGINNIN'!
ONLY--ONLY IT HURTS! HURTS SO BAD! POUNDIN' IN MY HEAD...
DON'T KNOW IF I CAN TAKE MUCH MORE! DON'T KNOW IF...
IT WORKED!

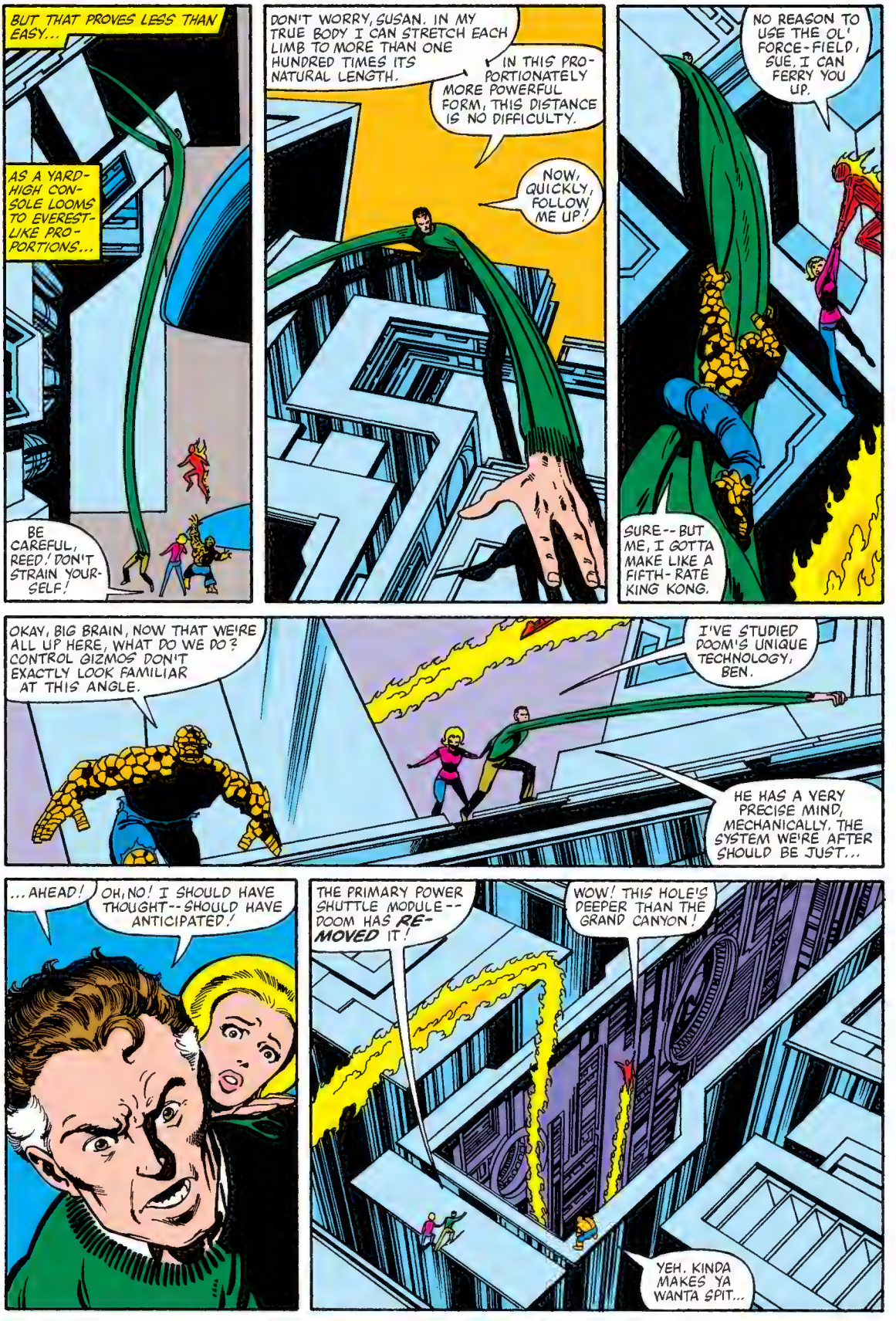

STEADY, BEN. I DON'T HAVE THE EQUIPMENT TO RUN A COMPLETE PHYSICAL ON YOU HERE.
HOW DO YOU FEEL?
LOUSY! HOW AM I SUPPOSED TA FEEL?! I'M THE THING AGIN, AIN'T I?
REED? I THOUGHT I HEARD...
OH!
ALICIA! NO! NO! GET HER OUTTA HERE! GET HER AWAY!
ALICIA -- PERHAPS YOU SHOULD...
BEN -- MY DARLING -- WHAT IS IT? WHAT'S WRONG?
GO AWAY, ALICIA! PLEASE! I DON'T WANT YOU TO SEE ME LIKE THIS!
NOT LIKE THIS!
OH -- OH, BEN! MY POOR, FOOLISH, WONDERFUL BEN! DID YOU THINK I ONLY LOVED YOU BECAUSE I COULD NOT SEE? I WAS BORN WITH SIGHT, BEN. I REMEMBERED COLOR.
AND I HAVE "SEEN" YOU WITH MY FINGERTIPS A THOUSAND TIMES. I DO NOT LOVE YOU BECAUSE OF MY BLINDNESS, MY DARLING. I LOVE YOU DESPITE IT.
Y-YOU MEAN --YOU'VE ALWAYS KNOWN WHAT I LOOKED LIKE -- WHAT THE THING LOOKS LIKE?
OF COURSE, DEAREST BEN! AND I HAVE ALWAYS LOVED YOU!
LET US THEN TURN AWAY FROM TWO LOVERS WHOSE NEXT WORDS ARE FOR THEIR EARS ALONE...

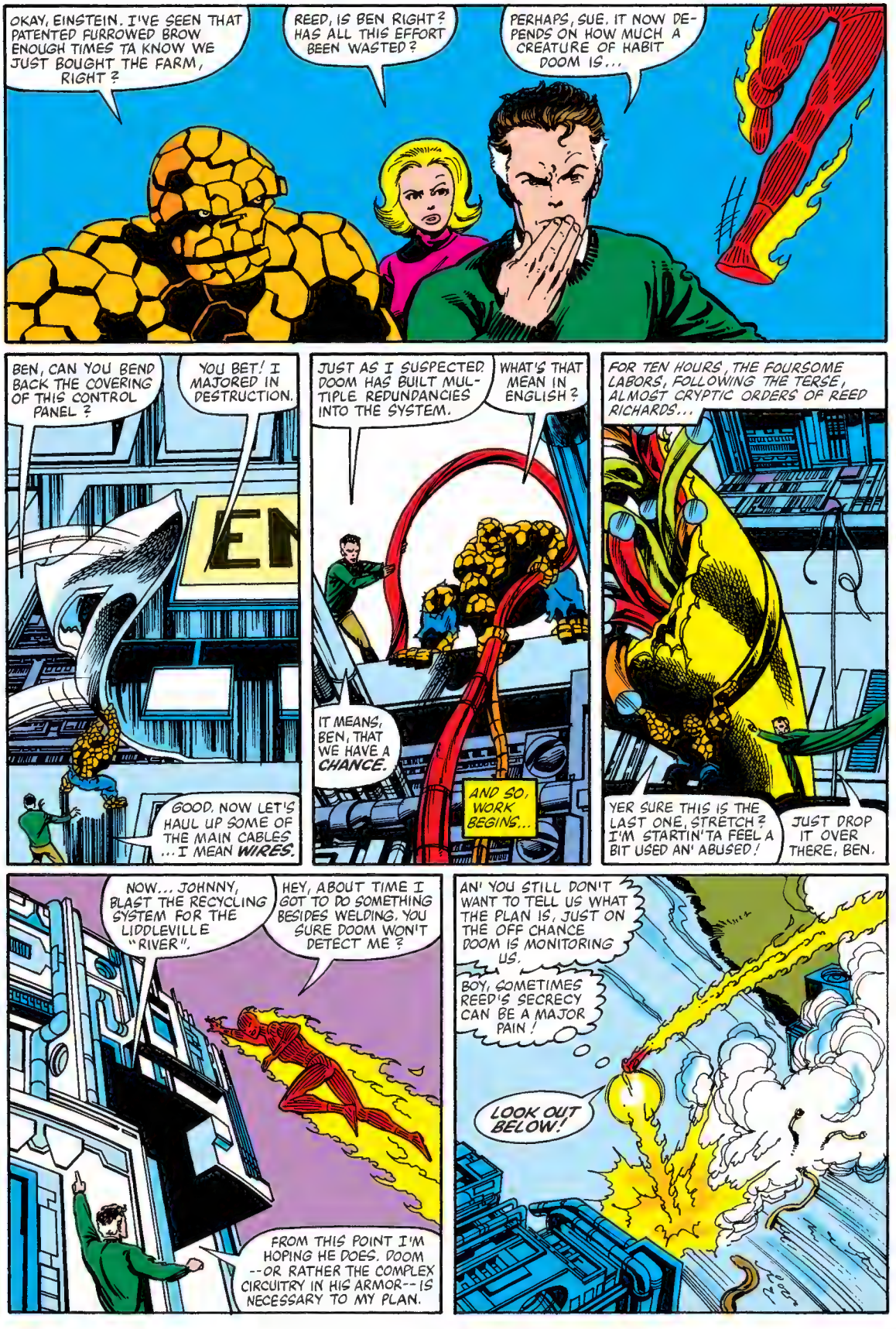

AND MOVE AHEAD A FEW HOURS TO FIND JOHNNY STORM STROLLING A QUIET COUNTRY LANE JUST OUTSIDE LIDDLEVILLE...
SUDDENLY...
HALT HUMAN. TURN BACK! NONE MAY PASS BEYOND THIS BOUNDARY ZONE-- BY ORDER OF DOCTOR DOOM!
DOOM'S GUARDIAN ROBOTS! REED WAS RIGHT!
SORRY, CHUCKLES. DOC DOOM'S ORDERS DON'T CARRY A WHOLE LOTTA WEIGHT AROUND HERE--
--OR, PUT ANOTHER WAY...
FLAME ON!
HOT DOG! I SLAGGED THE CREEP!
OUR POWERS ARE BOOSTED ALMOST TWENTY TIMES!
ALERT ALL UNITS! UNIT KR-7 HAS BEEN NEUTRALIZED. TERMINATE INTRUDE...
AWK!
SORRY-- CAN'T LET YOU DO THAT...
UNITS KR-7 AND LB-9 ARE UNDER ASSAULT FROM UNIDENTIFIED FORCES...
PREPARE TA GET GOOSHED, YA TIN GALOOTS!
PREPARE TO...
IT'S CLOBBERIN' TIME!

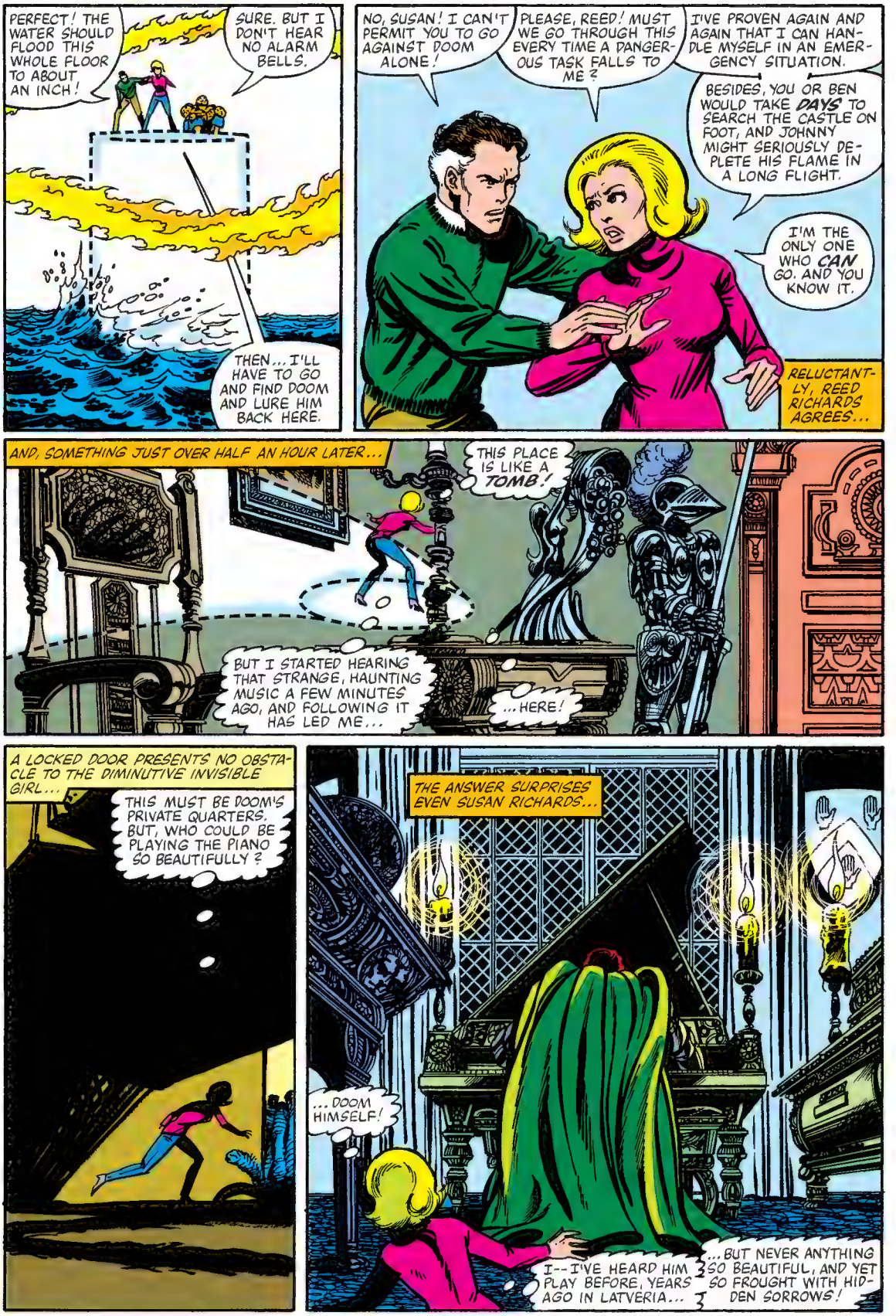

GRUNCH!
NOT BAD--THREE AT ONE GO.
BUT I AIN'T SEEN NOTHIN' YET TA TELL IF MY STRENGTH IS INCREASED AS MUCH AS REED SAID.
SNAP!
CRACKLE!
POP!
ELSEWHERE...
INTRUDER IDENTIFIED. HUMAN UNIT CODE NAMED MISTER FANTASTIC.
I SHALL TERMINATE.
SUE--ARE YOU READY?
ACTIVATE FIRING SEQUENCE. DESTROY...
AWK!
BA$M
MANIPULATORY APPENDAGE AND WEAPON DESTROYED UNIDENTIFIED FORCE...
NOT SO UNIDENTIFIED!
JUST THAT LI'L OLD INVISIBLE FORCE FIELD PROJECTOR--ME!
THE FIGHT AIN'T OVER YET, TROOPS!
REED--COMING OUT OF THAT TUNNEL...
BOY, OL' DOOMSY MUSTA CORNERED THE MARKET ON UGLIES!
HUMAN UNITS IDENTIFIED: MR. FANTASTIC, THE INVISIBLE GIRL, THE THING, THE HUMAN TORCH.
ADJUST ATTACK SEQUENCE TO COMPENSATE.

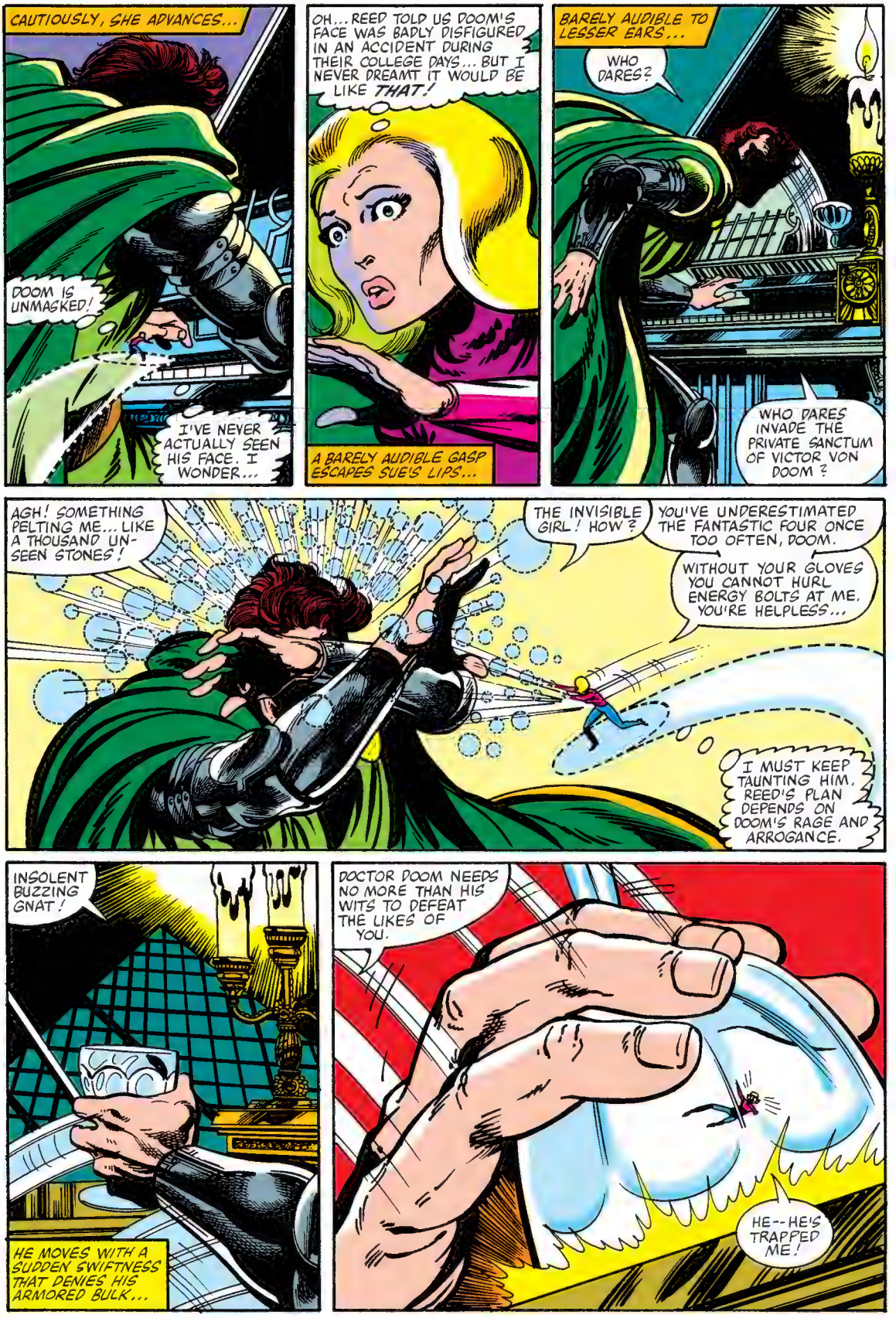

NOW'S THE PERFECT OPPORTUNITY TO TEST MY INCREASED POWERS!
WAY TA GO, SIS!
ALERT! INVISIBLE FORCE-FIELD PUSHING THIS UNIT BACK!
BEN-- DUCK!
POONT
NOW, BEN. HURRY!
ALERT! SURFACE CONDUIT BLOCKED BY UNSEEN FORCE!
IT'S GONNA BE BLOCKED BY MORE'N THAT IN A SECOND!
I'VE HAD ME A FIRST CLASS, A-NUMBER-1 MAD ON ALL DAY!
YOU JOKERS ARE JUST WHAT I NEED TO BLOW OFF A L'IL STEAM!
MUNCH!
HUH! I'D FORGOTTEN HOW GOOD IT FEELS, SOMETIMES, HAVIN' THE THING'S STRENGTH.
JOHNNY--STOP! DON'T ATTEMPT TO FLY OVER THE WALL! DOOM MAY HAVE IMPLANTED HEAT SENSORS ALONG THE TOP!
BUT, NONE OF THE REST OF YOU CAN FLY...
...SO HOW DO WE GET OVER?
LEAVE THAT TO ME!

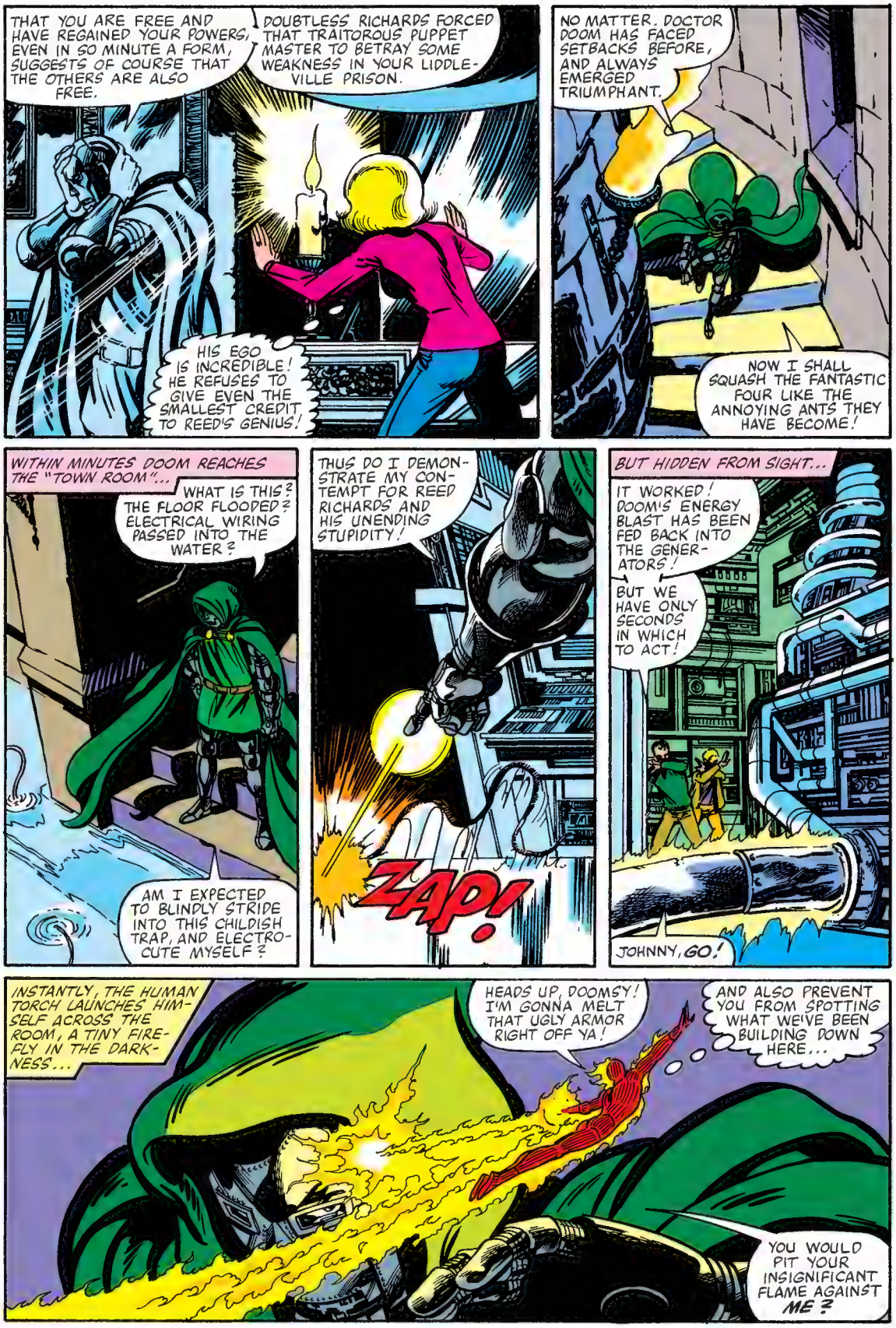
I RECENTLY LEARNED HOW TO USE MY INVISIBLE FORCE FIELD AS A MEANS OF TRAVEL. WITH MY INCREASED POWER, CARRYING ALL FOUR OF US SHOULD BE NO PROBLEM.
BE CAREFUL, SUE-- IN FACT, ALL OF YOU. DO NOT BECOME TOO ACCUSTOMED TO THE POWER LEVELS IN THESE BODIES.
DON'T MOVE AROUND TOO MUCH. WE CAN'T SEE THE EDGES OF THIS COLUMN. DON'T RISK FALLING OFF.
ALL I'M RISKIN' IS MY LUNCH. DO WE HAVE TO GO SO BLAMED FAST?
AW, DON'T BE SUCH A WET BLANKET, THING! THIS IS COOL! I FEEL LIKE THE SILVER SURFER!
MOMENTS LATER, AS SUE CAREFULLY ADJUSTS THE ANGLE OF HER FORCE-FIELD TO BRING THEM DOWN TO THE FLOOR...
EXCELLENT, MY DARLING! BUT YOU MUST TAKE A MOMENT TO REST NOW.
YES-- IT WAS TAXING...
OKAY, WHERE'S SOMETHING I CAN BREAK?
UP THERE, BEN. THAT IS THE ONLY CONTROL CONSOLE IN THIS ROOM!
THEN WHAT ARE WE WAITIN' FOR? LET'S GO!
ACTIVATE
ENGAGE
ENABLE

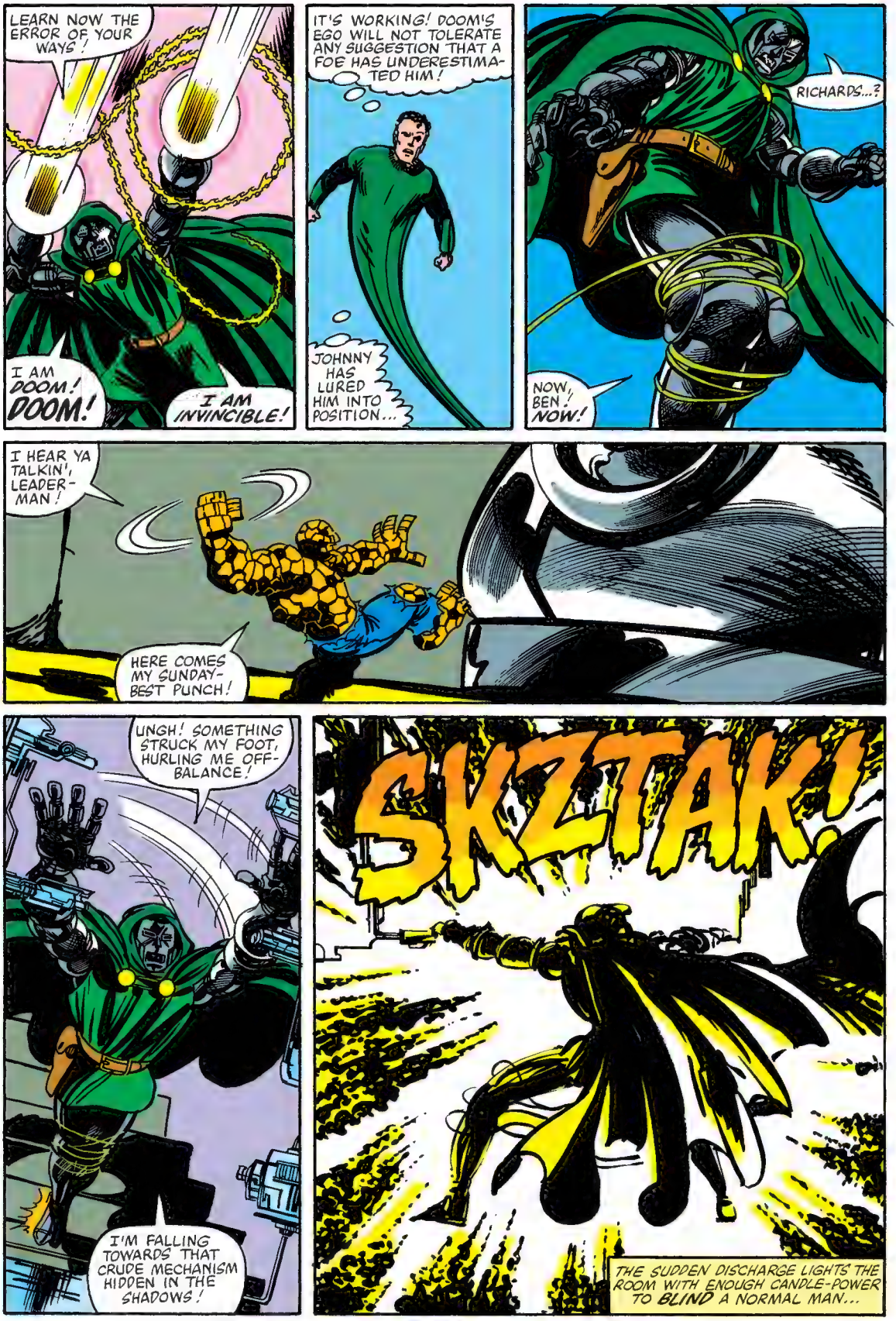

BUT THAT PROVES LESS THAN EASY...
AS A YARD-HIGH CONSOLE LOOMS TO EVEREST-LIKE PROPORTIONS...
BE CAREFUL, REED! DON'T STRAIN YOURSELF!
DON'T WORRY, SUSAN. IN MY TRUE BODY I CAN STRETCH EACH LIMB TO MORE THAN ONE HUNDRED TIMES ITS NATURAL LENGTH.
IN THIS PROPORTIONATELY MORE POWERFUL FORM, THIS DISTANCE IS NO DIFFICULTY.
NOW, QUICKLY, FOLLOW ME UP!
NO REASON TO USE THE OL' FORCE-FIELD, SUE. I CAN FERRY YOU UP.
SURE--BUT ME, I GOTTA MAKE LIKE A FIFTH-RATE KING KONG.
OKAY, BIG BRAIN, NOW THAT WE'RE ALL UP HERE, WHAT DO WE DO? CONTROL GIZMOS DON'T EXACTLY LOOK FAMILIAR AT THIS ANGLE.
I'VE STUDIED DOOM'S UNIQUE TECHNOLOGY, BEN.
HE HAS A VERY PRECISE MIND, MECHANICALLY. THE SYSTEM WE'RE AFTER SHOULD BE JUST...
...AHEAD!
OH, NO! I SHOULD HAVE THOUGHT--SHOULD HAVE ANTICIPATED!
THE PRIMARY POWER SHUTTLE MODULE--DOOM HAS RE-MOVED IT!
WOW! THIS HOLE'S DEEPER THAN THE GRAND CANYON!
YEH. KINDA MAKES YA WANTA SPIT...

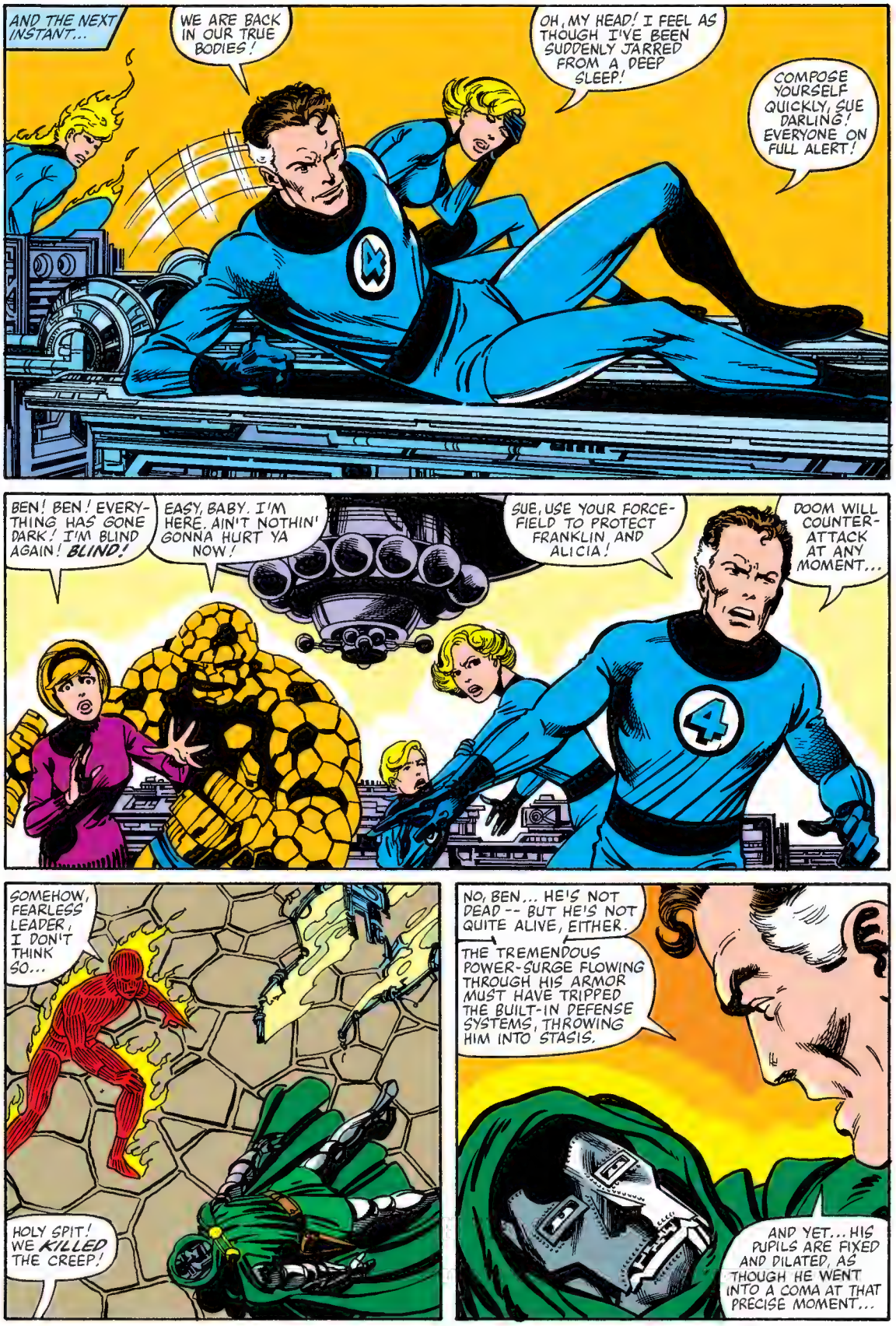

OKAY, EINSTEIN. I'VE SEEN THAT PATENTED FURROWED BROW ENOUGH TIMES TA KNOW WE JUST BOUGHT THE FARM, RIGHT?
REED, IS BEN RIGHT? HAS ALL THIS EFFORT BEEN WASTED?
PERHAPS, SUE. IT NOW DEPENDS ON HOW MUCH A CREATURE OF HABIT DOOM IS...
BEN, CAN YOU BEND BACK THE COVERING OF THIS CONTROL PANEL?
YOU BET! I MAJORED IN DESTRUCTION.
GOOD. NOW LET'S HAUL UP SOME OF THE MAIN CABLES ...I MEAN WIRES.
JUST AS I SUSPECTED. DOOM HAS BUILT MULTIPLE REDUNDANCIES INTO THE SYSTEM.
WHAT'S THAT MEAN IN ENGLISH?
IT MEANS, BEN, THAT WE HAVE A CHANCE.
AND SO, WORK BEGINS...
FOR TEN HOURS, THE FOURSOME LABORS, FOLLOWING THE TERSE, ALMOST CRYPTIC ORDERS OF REED RICHARDS...
YER SURE THIS IS THE LAST ONE, STRETCH? I'M STARTIN'TA FEEL A BIT USED AN' ABUSED!
JUST DROP IT OVER THERE, BEN.
NOW... JOHNNY, BLAST THE RECYCLING SYSTEM FOR THE LIDDLEVILLE "RIVER".
HEY, ABOUT TIME I GOT TO DO SOMETHING BESIDES WELDING. YOU SURE DOOM WON'T DETECT ME?
FROM THIS POINT I'M HOPING HE DOES. DOOM --OR RATHER THE COMPLEX CIRCUITRY IN HIS ARMOR-- IS NECESSARY TO MY PLAN.
AN' YOU STILL DON'T WANT TO TELL US WHAT THE PLAN IS, JUST ON THE OFF CHANCE DOOM IS MONITORING US.
BOY, SOMETIMES REED'S SECRECY CAN BE A MAJOR PAIN!
LOOK OUT BELOW!

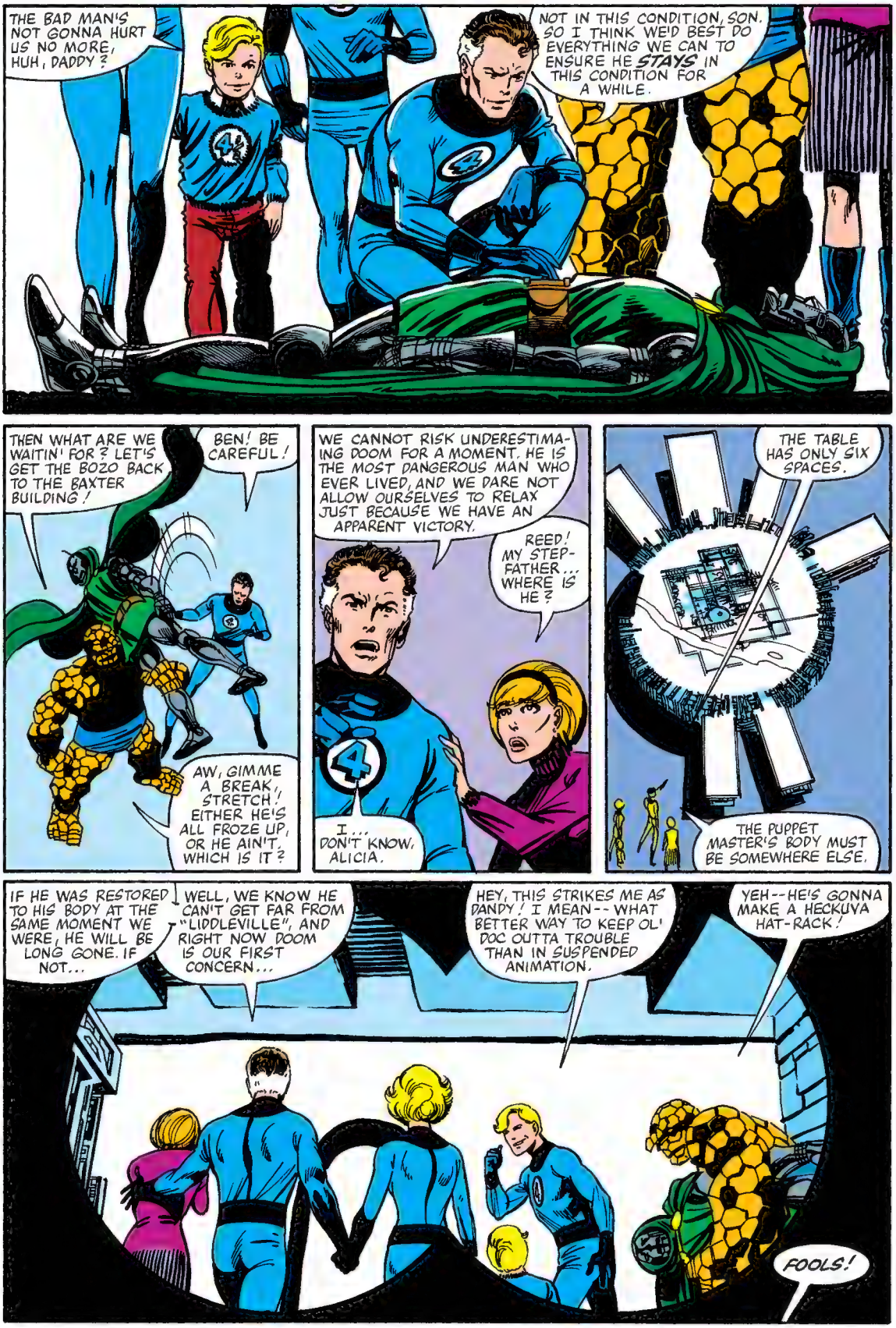

PERFECT! THE WATER SHOULD FLOOD THIS WHOLE FLOOR TO ABOUT AN INCH!
SURE. BUT I DON'T HEAR NO ALARM BELLS.
THEN... I'LL HAVE TO GO AND FIND DOOM AND LURE HIM BACK HERE.
NO, SUSAN! I CAN'T PERMIT YOU TO GO AGAINST DOOM ALONE!
PLEASE, REED! MUST WE GO THROUGH THIS EVERY TIME A DANGEROUS TASK FALLS TO ME?
I'VE PROVEN AGAIN AND AGAIN THAT I CAN HANDLE MYSELF IN AN EMERGENCY SITUATION.
BESIDES, YOU OR BEN WOULD TAKE DAYS TO SEARCH THE CASTLE ON FOOT, AND JOHNNY MIGHT SERIOUSLY DEPLETE HIS FLAME IN A LONG FLIGHT.
I'M THE ONLY ONE WHO CAN GO. AND YOU KNOW IT.
RELUCTANTLY, REED RICHARDS AGREES...
AND, SOMETHING JUST OVER HALF AN HOUR LATER...
THIS PLACE IS LIKE A TOMB!
BUT I STARTED HEARING THAT STRANGE, HAUNTING MUSIC A FEW MINUTES AGO, AND FOLLOWING IT HAS LED ME...
...HERE!
A LOCKED DOOR PRESENTS NO OBSTACLE TO THE DIMINUTIVE INVISIBLE GIRL...
THIS MUST BE DOOM'S PRIVATE QUARTERS. BUT, WHO COULD BE PLAYING THE PIANO SO BEAUTIFULLY?
THE ANSWER SURPRISES EVEN SUSAN RICHARDS...
...DOOM HIMSELF!
I--I'VE HEARD HIM PLAY BEFORE, YEARS AGO IN LATVERIA...
...BUT NEVER ANYTHING SO BEAUTIFUL, AND YET SO FROUGHT WITH HIDDEN SORROWS!


CAUTIOUSLY, SHE ADVANCES...
DOOM IS UNMASKED!
I'VE NEVER ACTUALLY SEEN HIS FACE. I WONDER...
OH... REED TOLD US DOOM'S FACE WAS BADLY DISFIGURED IN AN ACCIDENT DURING THEIR COLLEGE DAYS... BUT I NEVER DREAMT IT WOULD BE LIKE THAT!
A BARELY AUDIBLE GASP ESCAPES SUE'S LIPS...
BARELY AUDIBLE TO LESSER EARS...
WHO DARES?
WHO DARES INVADE THE PRIVATE SANCTUM OF VICTOR VON DOOM?
AGH! SOMETHING PELTING ME... LIKE A THOUSAND UNSEEN STONES!
THE INVISIBLE GIRL! HOW?
YOU'VE UNDERESTIMATED THE FANTASTIC FOUR ONCE TOO OFTEN, DOOM.
WITHOUT YOUR GLOVES YOU CANNOT HURL ENERGY BOLTS AT ME. YOU'RE HELPLESS...
I MUST KEEP TAUNTING HIM, REED'S PLAN DEPENDS ON DOOM'S RAGE AND ARROGANCE.
INSOLENT BUZZING GNAT!
HE MOVES WITH A SUDDEN SWIFTNESS THAT DENIES HIS ARMORED BULK...
DOCTOR DOOM NEEDS NO MORE THAN HIS WITS TO DEFEAT THE LIKES OF YOU.
HE--HE'S TRAPPED ME!


THAT YOU ARE FREE AND HAVE REGAINED YOUR POWERS, EVEN IN SO MINUTE A FORM, SUGGESTS OF COURSE THAT THE OTHERS ARE ALSO FREE.
DOUBTLESS RICHARDS FORCED THAT TRAITOROUS PUPPET MASTER TO BETRAY SOME WEAKNESS IN YOUR LIDDLE-VILLE PRISON.
HIS EGO IS INCREDIBLE! HE REFUSES TO GIVE EVEN THE SMALLEST CREDIT TO REED'S GENIUS!
NO MATTER. DOCTOR DOOM HAS FACED SETBACKS BEFORE, AND ALWAYS EMERGED TRIUMPHANT.
NOW I SHALL SQUASH THE FANTASTIC FOUR LIKE THE ANNOYING ANTS THEY HAVE BECOME!
WITHIN MINUTES DOOM REACHES THE "TOWN ROOM"...
WHAT IS THIS? THE FLOOR FLOODED? ELECTRICAL WIRING PASSED INTO THE WATER?
AM I EXPECTED TO BLINDLY STRIDE INTO THIS CHILDISH TRAP, AND ELECTRO-CUTE MYSELF?
THUS DO I DEMON-STRATE MY CON-TEMPT FOR REED RICHARDS AND HIS UNENDING STUPIDITY!
ZAP!
BUT HIDDEN FROM SIGHT...
IT WORKED! DOOM'S ENERGY BLAST HAS BEEN FED BACK INTO THE GENER-ATORS!
BUT WE HAVE ONLY SECONDS IN WHICH TO ACT!
JOHNNY, GO!
INSTANTLY, THE HUMAN TORCH LAUNCHES HIM-SELF ACROSS THE ROOM, A TINY FIRE-FLY IN THE DARK-NESS...
HEADS UP, DOOMSY! I'M GONNA MELT THAT UGLY ARMOR RIGHT OFF YA!
AND ALSO PREVENT YOU FROM SPOTTING WHAT WE'VE BEEN BUILDING DOWN HERE...
YOU WOULD PIT YOUR INSIGNIFICANT FLAME AGAINST ME?


LEARN NOW THE ERROR OF YOUR WAYS!
I AM DOOM! DOOM!
I AM INVINCIBLE!
IT'S WORKING! DOOM'S EGO WILL NOT TOLERATE ANY SUGGESTION THAT A FOE HAS UNDERESTIMATED HIM!
JOHNNY HAS LURED HIM INTO POSITION...
RICHARDS...?
NOW, BEN! NOW!
I HEAR YA TALKIN', LEADER-MAN!
HERE COMES MY SUNDAY-BEST PUNCH!
UNGH! SOMETHING STRUCK MY FOOT, HURLING ME OFF-BALANCE!
I'M FALLING TOWARDS THAT CRUDE MECHANISM HIDDEN IN THE SHADOWS!
SKZTAK!
THE SUDDEN DISCHARGE LIGHTS THE ROOM WITH ENOUGH CANDLE-POWER TO BLIND A NORMAL MAN...


AND THE NEXT INSTANT...
WE ARE BACK IN OUR TRUE BODIES!
OH, MY HEAD! I FEEL AS THOUGH I'VE BEEN SUDDENLY JARRED FROM A DEEP SLEEP!
COMPOSE YOURSELF QUICKLY, SUE DARLING! EVERYONE ON FULL ALERT!
BEN! BEN! EVERYTHING HAS GONE DARK! I'M BLIND AGAIN! BLIND!
EASY, BABY. I'M HERE. AIN'T NOTHIN' GONNA HURT YA NOW!
SUE, USE YOUR FORCE-FIELD TO PROTECT FRANKLIN AND ALICIA!
DOOM WILL COUNTER-ATTACK AT ANY MOMENT...
SOMEHOW, FEARLESS LEADER, I DON'T THINK SO...
HOLY SPIT! WE KILLED THE CREEP!
NO, BEN... HE'S NOT DEAD -- BUT HE'S NOT QUITE ALIVE, EITHER.
THE TREMENDOUS POWER-SURGE FLOWING THROUGH HIS ARMOR MUST HAVE TRIPPED THE BUILT-IN DEFENSE SYSTEMS, THROWING HIM INTO STASIS.
AND YET... HIS PUPILS ARE FIXED AND DILATED, AS THOUGH HE WENT INTO A COMA AT THAT PRECISE MOMENT...


THE BAD MAN'S NOT GONNA HURT US NO MORE, HUH, DADDY?
NOT IN THIS CONDITION, SON. SO I THINK WE'D BEST DO EVERYTHING WE CAN TO ENSURE HE STAYS IN THIS CONDITION FOR A WHILE.
THEN WHAT ARE WE WAITIN' FOR? LET'S GET THE BOZO BACK TO THE BAXTER BUILDING!
BEN! BE CAREFUL!
AW, GIMME A BREAK, STRETCH! EITHER HE'S ALL FROZE UP, OR HE AIN'T. WHICH IS IT?
WE CANNOT RISK UNDERESTIMATING DOOM FOR A MOMENT. HE IS THE MOST DANGEROUS MAN WHO EVER LIVED, AND WE DARE NOT ALLOW OURSELVES TO RELAX JUST BECAUSE WE HAVE AN APPARENT VICTORY.
REED! MY STEP-FATHER... WHERE IS HE?
I... DON'T KNOW, ALICIA.
THE TABLE HAS ONLY SIX SPACES.
THE PUPPET MASTER'S BODY MUST BE SOMEWHERE ELSE.
IF HE WAS RESTORED TO HIS BODY AT THE SAME MOMENT WE WERE, HE WILL BE LONG GONE. IF NOT...
WELL, WE KNOW HE CAN'T GET FAR FROM "LIDDLEVILLE", AND RIGHT NOW DOOM IS OUR FIRST CONCERN...
HEY, THIS STRIKES ME AS DANDY! I MEAN -- WHAT BETTER WAY TO KEEP OL' DOC OUTTA TROUBLE THAN IN SUSPENDED ANIMATION.
YEH -- HE'S GONNA MAKE A HECKUVA HAT-RACK!
FOOLS!

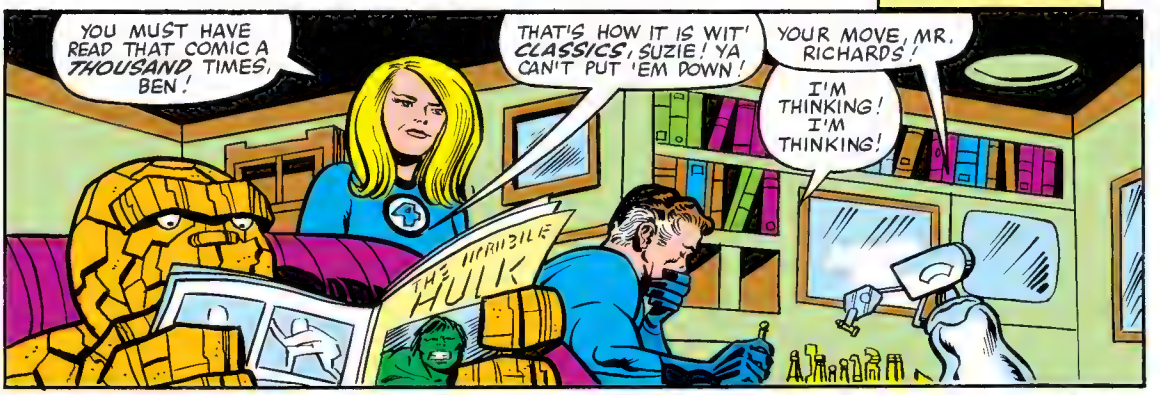
JUST OUTSIDE LIDDLEVILLE COLLEGE...
ONCE AGAIN THEY SOW THE SEED OF THEIR OWN UNDOING BY UNDERESTIMATING DOOM!
RICHARDS IS TOO STUPID TO REALIZE THAT USING MY ARMOR TO TRIGGER HIS CRUDE TRANSFERAL SYSTEM...
...SERVED ALSO TO TRANSMIT MY MIND INTO THE ROBOTIC BODY OF "VINCENT VAUGHN."
NOW I HAVE BUT TO WAIT UNTIL THEY ARE OFF-GUARD...
AND A SIMPLE TWIST OF THIS RING WILL RESTORE ME TO MY TRUE BODY.
AND THEN I SHALL DESTROY...
WHAT!?!
CRACK!
YOU HAVE DESTROYED ENOUGH, VON DOOM. YOU HAVE TWISTED AND PERVERTED MY DREAMS OF HAPPINESS FOR ALICIA. YOU TURNED MY LIDDLEVILLE INTO A STAGE FOR YOUR TRIVIAL VENGEANCE SCHEME.
WHAT IS YOUR HATRED FOR THE FANTASTIC FOUR COMPARED TO MY HOPES FOR MY STEP-DAUGHTER?
I HAVE REPROGRAMMED THE ROBOTS TO SERVE MY WILL. AND MINE ALONE.
MASTERS... YOU CANNOT...
NO!
I CAN DO ANYTHING, DOOM!
THERE IS YOUR ENEMY, MY PUPPETS! THERE IS THE DESPOILER, THE CORRUPTOR!
DESTROY HIM!
DOOM FLEES, KNOWING THAT SHOULD THIS ROBOT BODY "DIE", HIS MIND, HIS SOUL WILL PERISH WITH IT.
HE RUNS, KNOWING THAT HE CAN DO SO FOREVER, FOR AS A ROBOT HE WILL NOT TIRE, WILL NOT NEED TO PAUSE FOR REST...
BUT, THEN, NEITHER WILL THEY...
NEITHER WILL THEY...

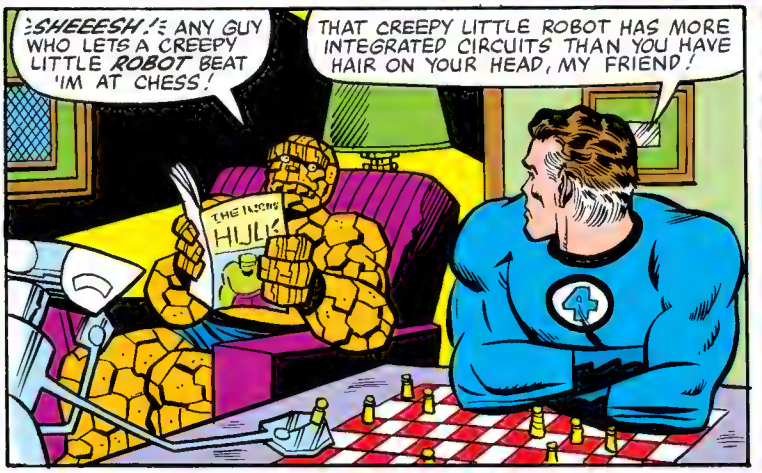
THE CHALLENGE OF DR. DOOM!

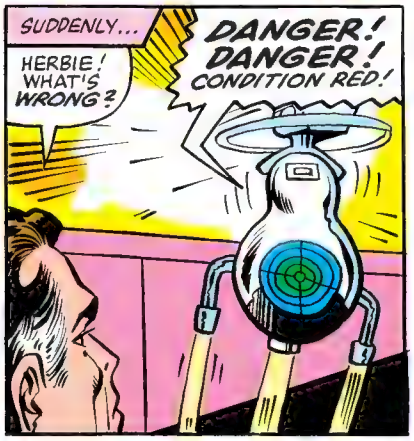
STAN LEE / SCRIPT | JACK KIRBY* / BREAKDOWNS | JIM NOVAK / LETTERS | GEORGE ROUSSOS / COLORS
JIM SALICRUP, EDITOR | JIM SHOOTER, EDITOR-IN-CHIEF
*SEE PAGE 19 FOR A COMPLETE LISTING OF ALL OUR SPECIAL GUEST-INKERS!

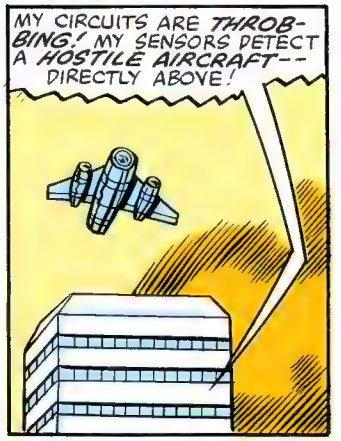
IMPORTANT NOTE! HEY, REMEMBER THE F.F. CARTOON SHOW THAT WAS ON TV. A FEW SEASONS AGO? REMEMBER THE SIMPLE, YET STUNNING SCRIPTS BY **STAN THE MAN**? -- THE DYNAMIC LAYOUTS BY JOLLY **JACK KIRBY**? --AND WHAT ABOUT **HERBIE THE ROBOT**?! WELL, WE THOUGHT IT WOULD BE FUN TO TAKE ONE OF THOSE SHOWS AND TURN IT INTO AN HONEST-TO-GOSH MARVEL COMIC! THIS PARTICULAR TALE, FEATURING DOCTOR DOOM, SEEMED PERFECT FOR THIS SPECIAL **20TH** ANNIVERSARY ISSUE! IT'S A SOMEWHAT SIMPLIFIED VERSION OF **F.F.#5** AND -- WELL, YOU GET THE IDEA! ENJOY!

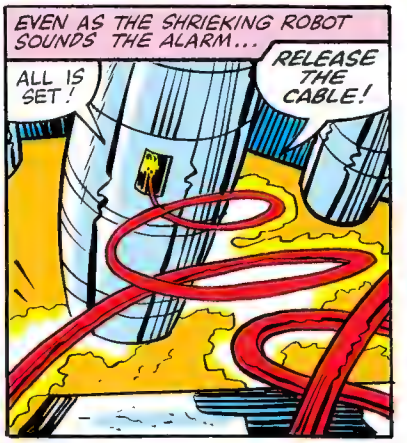
--JIM SALICRUP

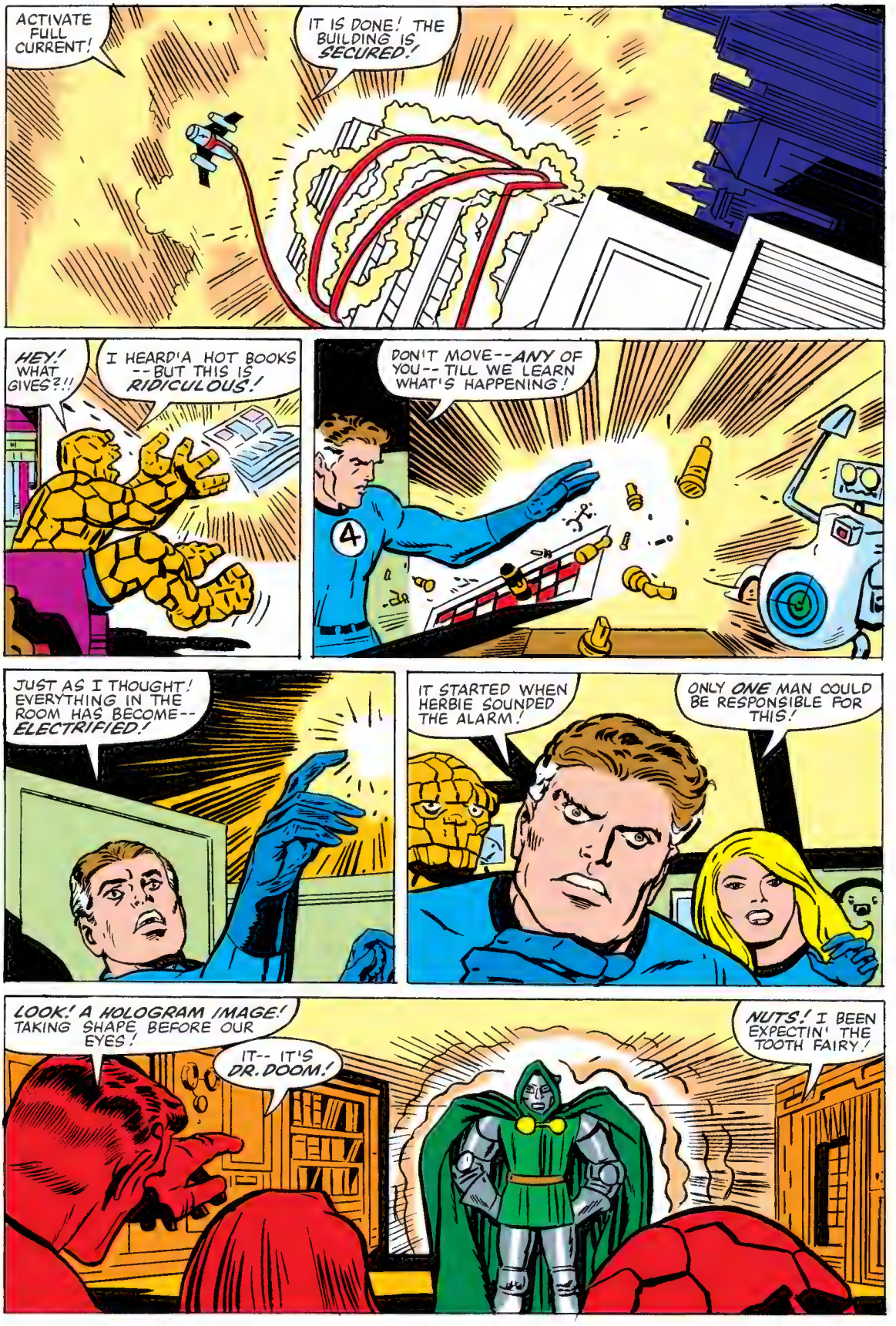

YOU MUST HAVE READ THAT COMIC A THOUSAND TIMES, BEN!
THAT'S HOW IT IS WIT' CLASSICS, SUZIE! YA CAN'T PUT 'EM DOWN!
YOUR MOVE, MR. RICHARDS!
I'M THINKING! I'M THINKING!
THE INCREDIBLE HULK

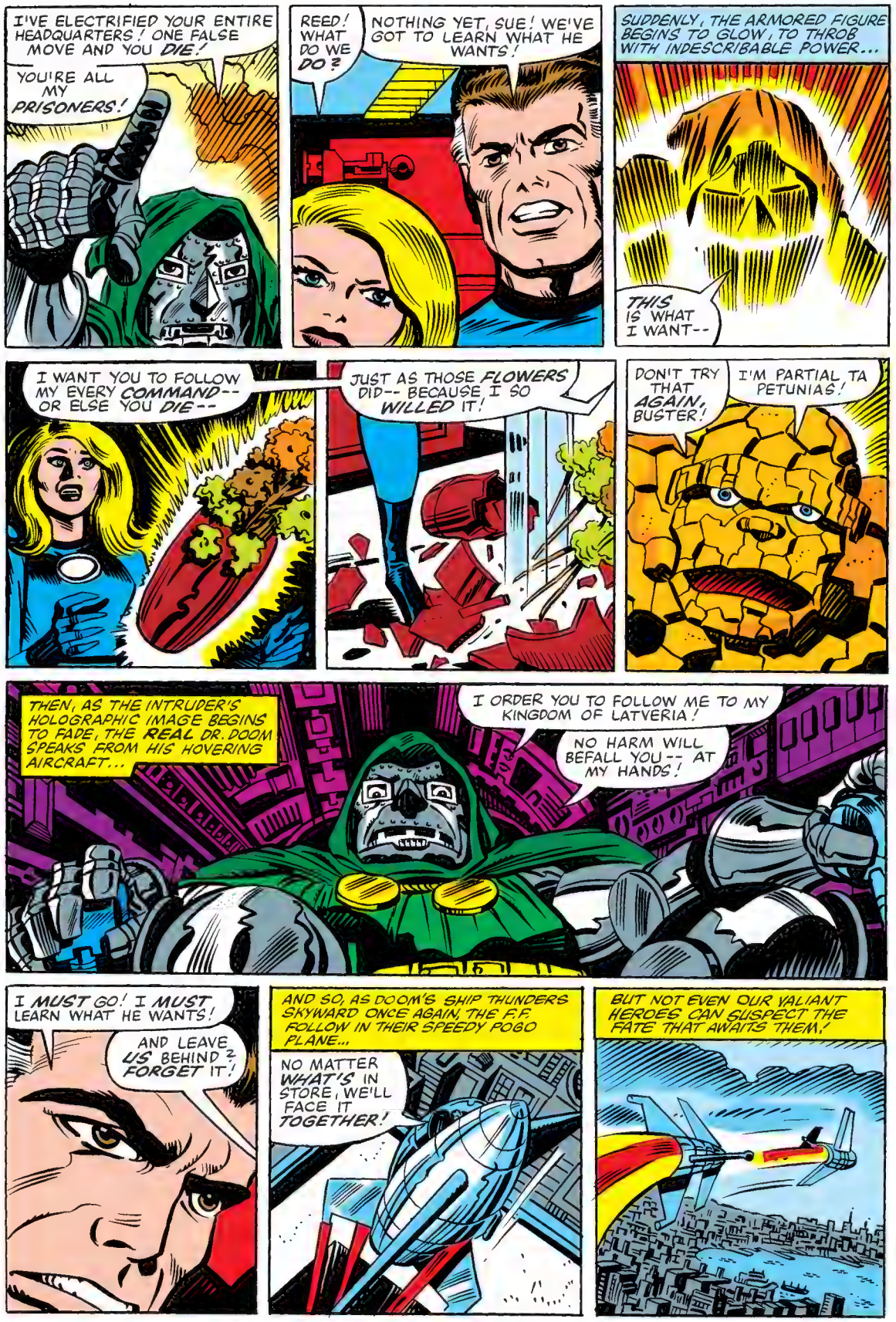

SHEEESH! ANY GUY WHO LETS A CREEPY LITTLE ROBOT BEAT 'IM AT CHESS!
THAT CREEPY LITTLE ROBOT HAS MORE INTEGRATED CIRCUITS THAN YOU HAVE HAIR ON YOUR HEAD, MY FRIEND!
THE INCREDIBLE HULK

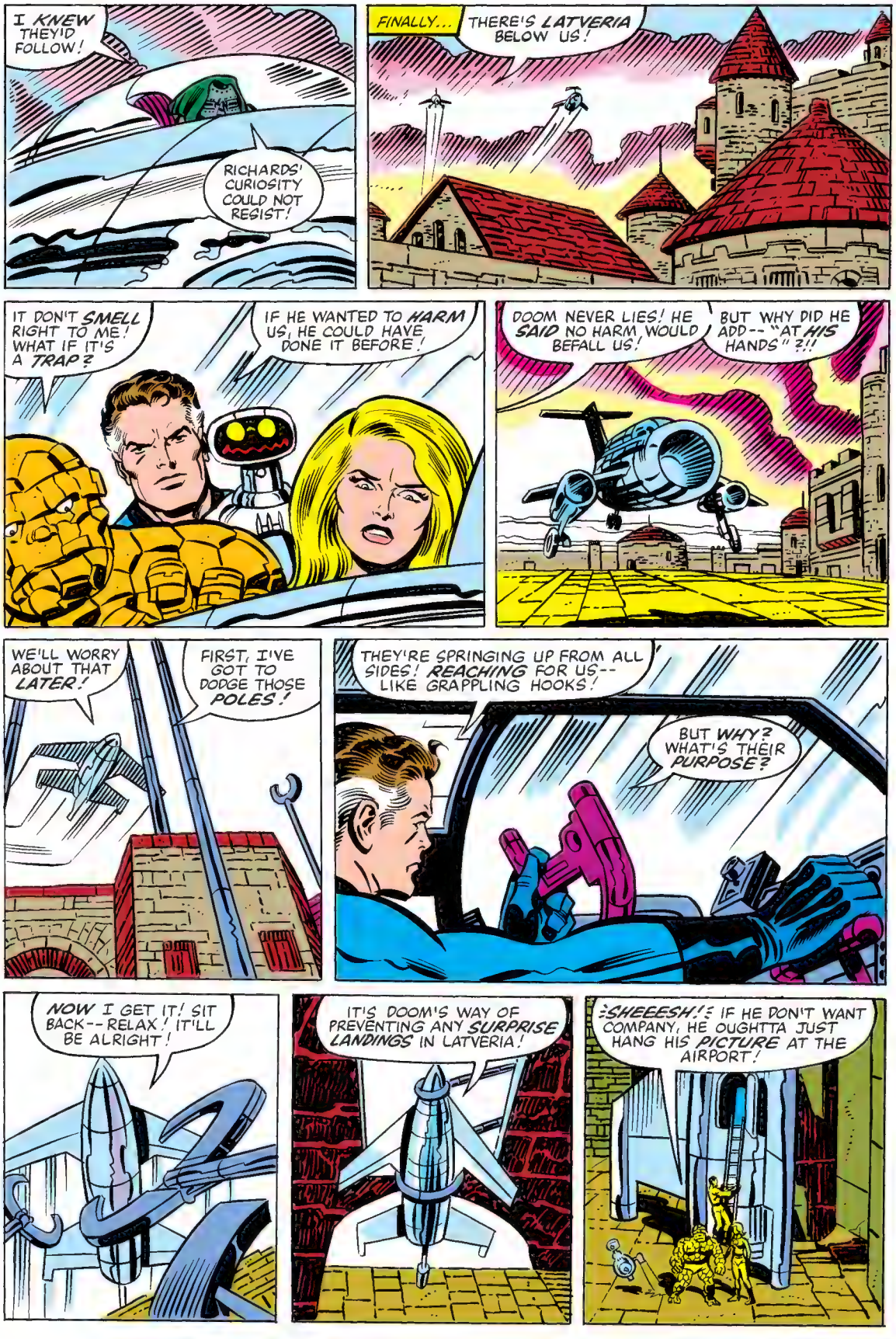


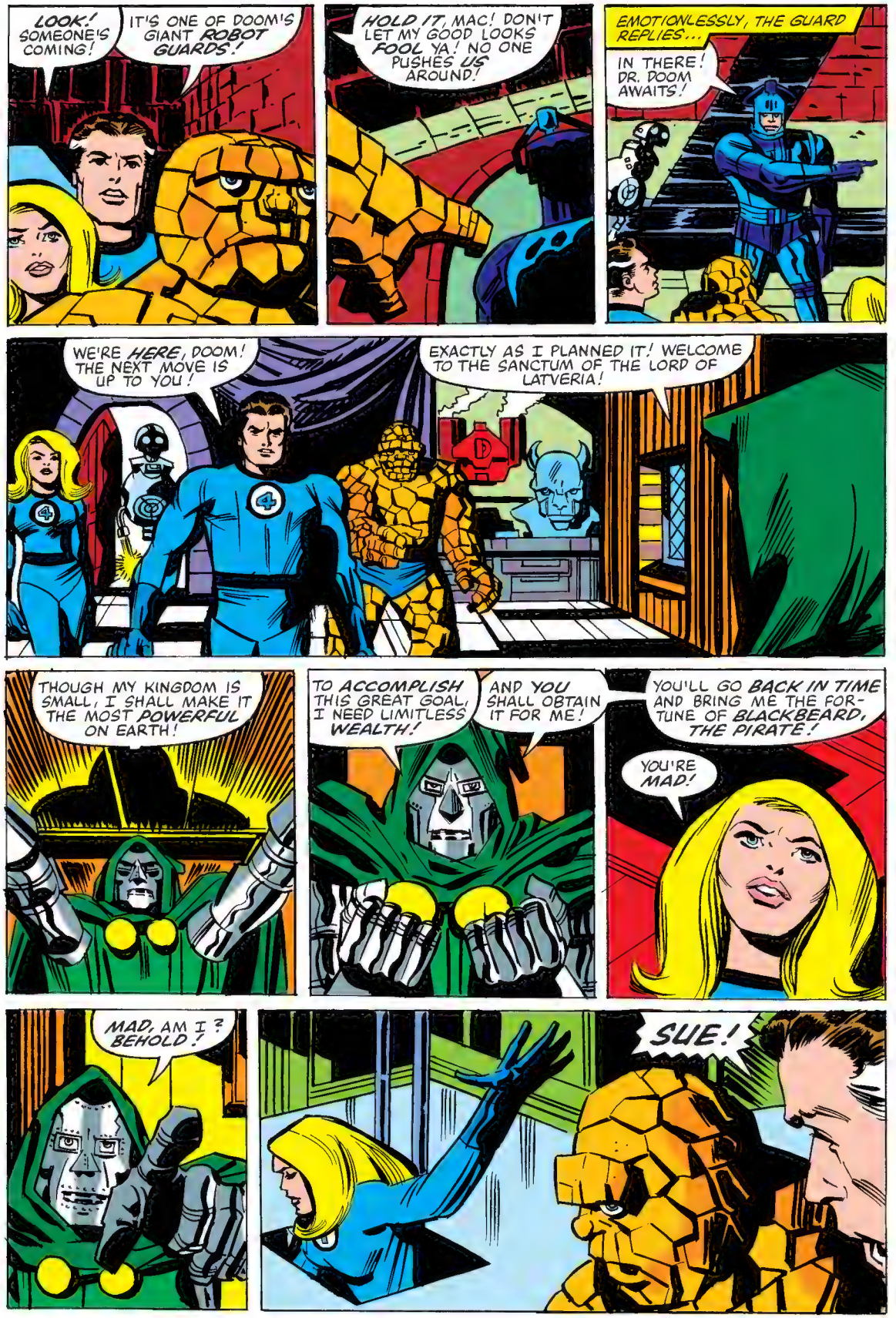


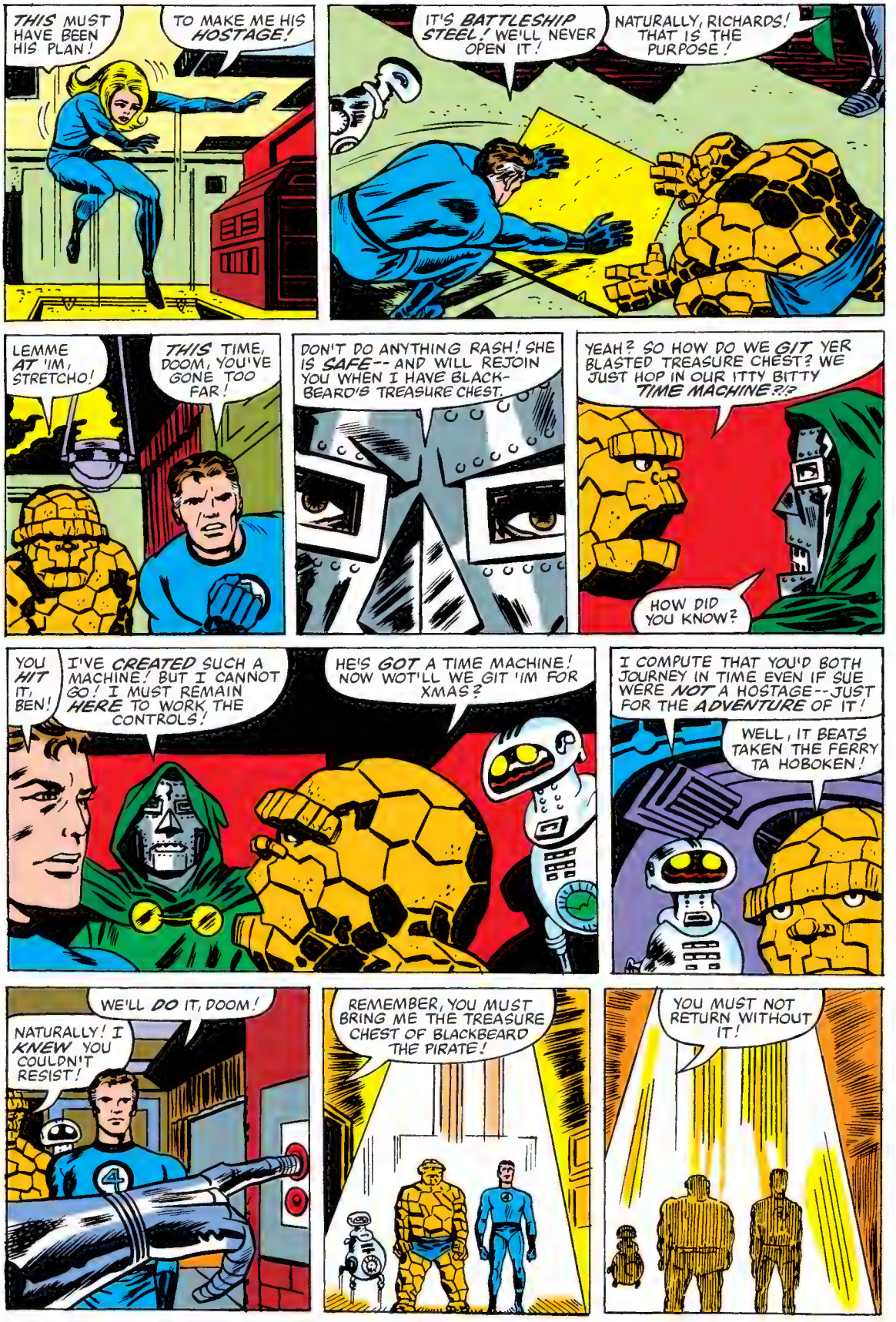


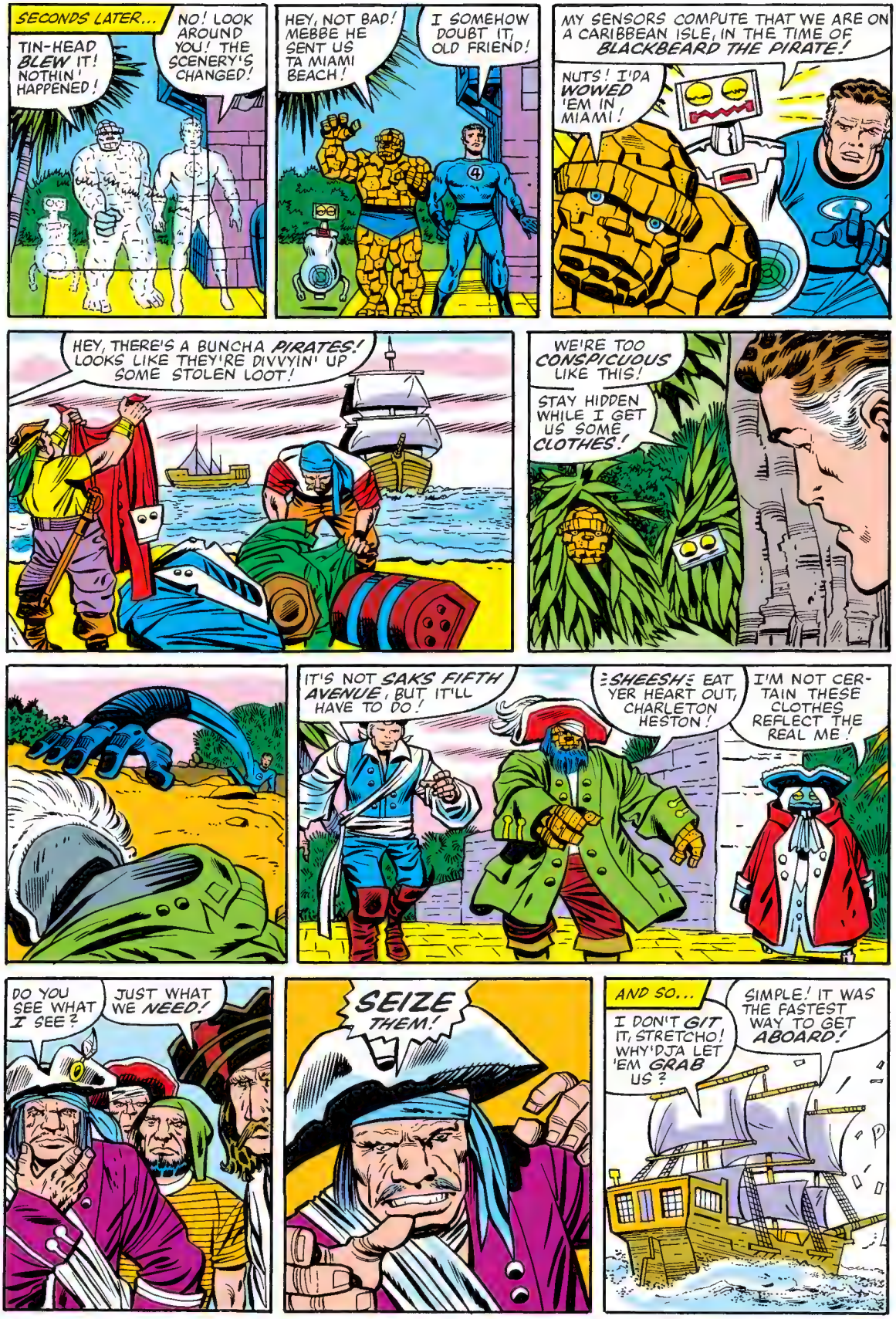

ACTIVATE FULL CURRENT!
IT IS DONE! THE BUILDING IS SECURED!
HEY! WHAT GIVES?!!
I HEARD'A HOT BOOKS --BUT THIS IS RIDICULOUS!
DON'T MOVE--ANY OF YOU-- TILL WE LEARN WHAT'S HAPPENING!
4
JUST AS I THOUGHT! EVERYTHING IN THE ROOM HAS BECOME-- ELECTRIFIED!
IT STARTED WHEN HERBIE SOUNDED THE ALARM!
ONLY ONE MAN COULD BE RESPONSIBLE FOR THIS!
LOOK! A HOLOGRAM IMAGE! TAKING SHAPE BEFORE OUR EYES!
IT-- IT'S DR. DOOM!
NUTS! I BEEN EXPECTIN' THE TOOTH FAIRY!


I'VE ELECTRIFIED YOUR ENTIRE HEADQUARTERS! ONE FALSE MOVE AND YOU DIE!
YOU'RE ALL MY PRISONERS!
REED! WHAT DO WE DO?
NOTHING YET, SUE! WE'VE GOT TO LEARN WHAT HE WANTS!
SUDDENLY, THE ARMORED FIGURE BEGINS TO GLOW, TO THROB WITH INDESCRIBABLE POWER...
THIS IS WHAT I WANT--
I WANT YOU TO FOLLOW MY EVERY COMMAND-- OR ELSE YOU DIE--
JUST AS THOSE FLOWERS DID-- BECAUSE I SO WILLED IT!
DON'T TRY THAT AGAIN, BUSTER!
I'M PARTIAL TA PETUNIAS!
THEN, AS THE INTRUDER'S HOLOGRAPHIC IMAGE BEGINS TO FADE, THE REAL DR. DOOM SPEAKS FROM HIS HOVERING AIRCRAFT...
I ORDER YOU TO FOLLOW ME TO MY KINGDOM OF LATVERIA!
NO HARM WILL BEFALL YOU-- AT MY HANDS!
I MUST GO! I MUST LEARN WHAT HE WANTS!
AND LEAVE US BEHIND? FORGET IT!
AND SO, AS DOOM'S SHIP THUNDERS SKYWARD ONCE AGAIN, THE F.F. FOLLOW IN THEIR SPEEDY POGO PLANE...
NO MATTER WHAT'S IN STORE, WE'LL FACE IT TOGETHER!
BUT NOT EVEN OUR VALIANT HEROES CAN SUSPECT THE FATE THAT AWAITS THEM!


I KNEW THEY'D FOLLOW!
RICHARDS' CURIOSITY COULD NOT RESIST!
FINALLY...
THERE'S LATVERIA BELOW US!
IT DON'T SMELL RIGHT TO ME! WHAT IF IT'S A TRAP?
IF HE WANTED TO HARM US, HE COULD HAVE DONE IT BEFORE!
DOOM NEVER LIES! HE SAID NO HARM WOULD BEFALL US!
BUT WHY DID HE ADD-- "AT HIS HANDS"?!!
WE'LL WORRY ABOUT THAT LATER!
FIRST, I'VE GOT TO DODGE THOSE POLES!
THEY'RE SPRINGING UP FROM ALL SIDES! REACHING FOR US-- LIKE GRAPPLING HOOKS!
BUT WHY? WHAT'S THEIR PURPOSE?
NOW I GET IT! SIT BACK-- RELAX! IT'LL BE ALRIGHT!
IT'S DOOM'S WAY OF PREVENTING ANY SURPRISE LANDINGS IN LATVERIA!
:SHEEESH!: IF HE DON'T WANT COMPANY, HE OUGHTTA JUST HANG HIS PICTURE AT THE AIRPORT!


LOOK! SOMEONE'S COMING!
IT'S ONE OF DOOM'S GIANT ROBOT GUARDS!
HOLD IT, MAC! DON'T LET MY GOOD LOOKS FOOL YA! NO ONE PUSHES US AROUND!
EMOTIONLESSLY, THE GUARD REPLIES...
IN THERE! DR. DOOM AWAITS!
WE'RE HERE, DOOM! THE NEXT MOVE IS UP TO YOU!
EXACTLY AS I PLANNED IT! WELCOME TO THE SANCTUM OF THE LORD OF LATVERIA!
THOUGH MY KINGDOM IS SMALL, I SHALL MAKE IT THE MOST POWERFUL ON EARTH!
TO ACCOMPLISH THIS GREAT GOAL, I NEED LIMITLESS WEALTH!
AND YOU SHALL OBTAIN IT FOR ME!
YOU'LL GO BACK IN TIME AND BRING ME THE FORTUNE OF BLACKBEARD, THE PIRATE!
YOU'RE MAD!
MAD, AM I? BEHOLD!
SUE!

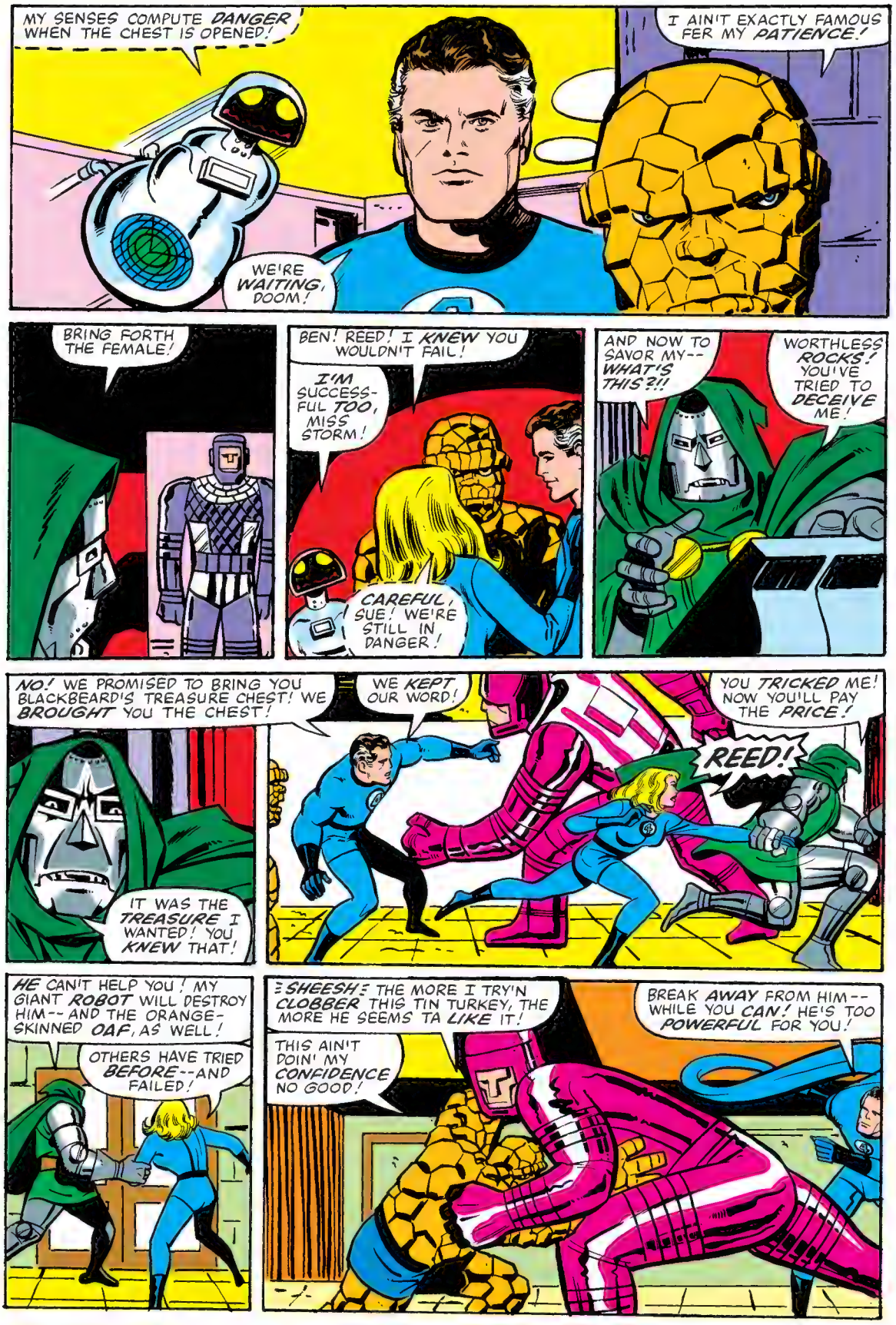

THIS MUST HAVE BEEN HIS PLAN!
TO MAKE ME HIS HOSTAGE!
IT'S BATTLESHIP STEEL! WE'LL NEVER OPEN IT!
NATURALLY, RICHARDS! THAT IS THE PURPOSE!
LEMME AT 'IM, STRETCHO!
THIS TIME, DOOM, YOU'VE GONE TOO FAR!
DON'T DO ANYTHING RASH! SHE IS SAFE-- AND WILL REJOIN YOU WHEN I HAVE BLACK-BEARD'S TREASURE CHEST.
YEAH? SO HOW DO WE GIT YER BLASTED TREASURE CHEST? WE JUST HOP IN OUR ITTY BITTY TIME MACHINE?!?
HOW DID YOU KNOW?
YOU HIT IT, BEN!
I'VE CREATED SUCH A MACHINE! BUT I CANNOT GO! I MUST REMAIN HERE TO WORK THE CONTROLS!
HE'S GOT A TIME MACHINE! NOW WOT'LL WE GIT 'IM FOR XMAS?
I COMPUTE THAT YOU'D BOTH JOURNEY IN TIME EVEN IF SUE WERE NOT A HOSTAGE--JUST FOR THE ADVENTURE OF IT!
WELL, IT BEATS TAKEN THE FERRY TA HOBOKEN!
WE'LL DO IT, DOOM!
NATURALLY! I KNEW YOU COULDN'T RESIST!
REMEMBER, YOU MUST BRING ME THE TREASURE CHEST OF BLACKBEARD THE PIRATE!
YOU MUST NOT RETURN WITHOUT IT!

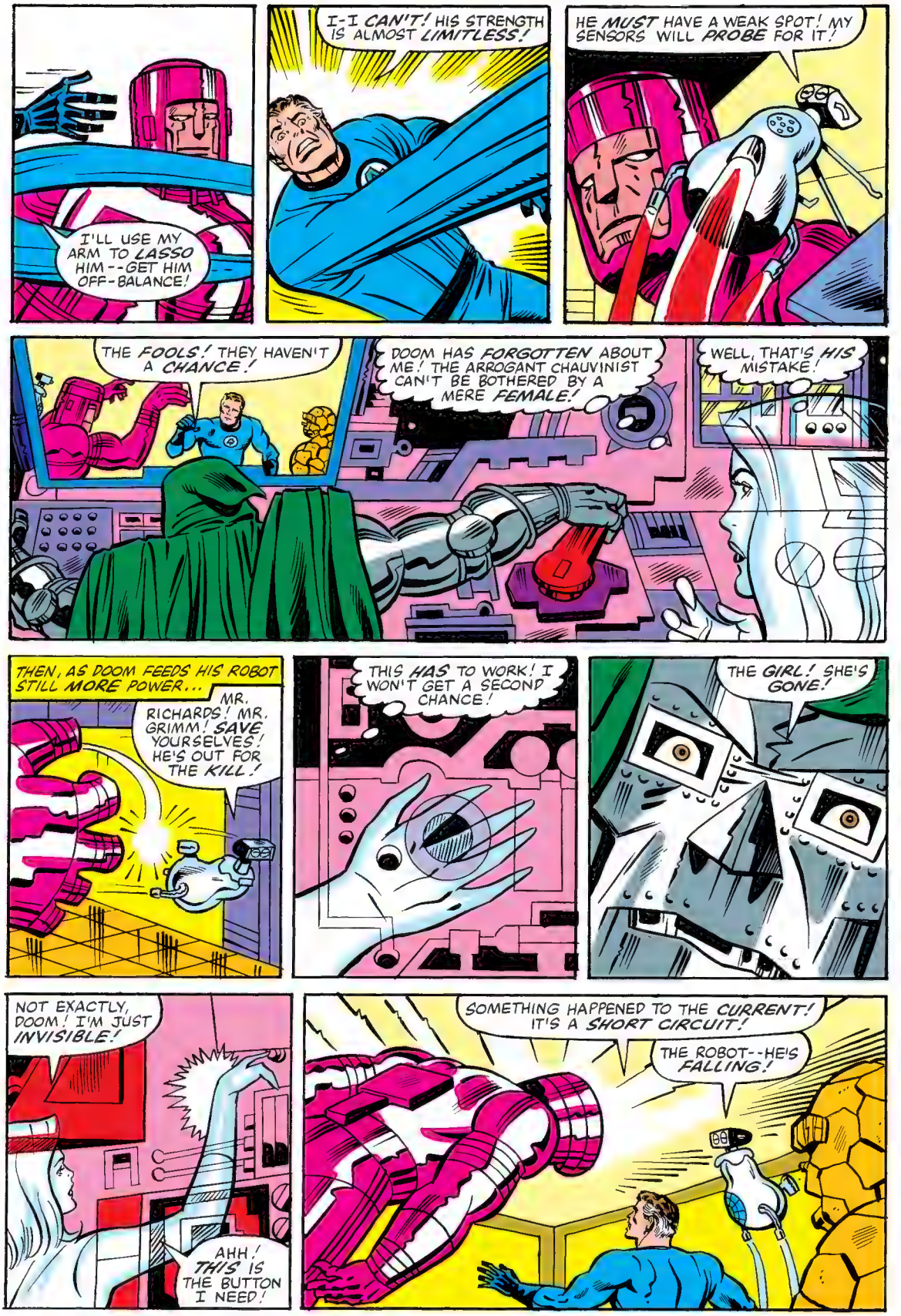

SECONDS LATER...
TIN-HEAD BLEW IT! NOTHIN' HAPPENED!
NO! LOOK AROUND YOU! THE SCENERY'S CHANGED!
HEY, NOT BAD! MEBBE HE SENT US TA MIAMI BEACH!
I SOMEHOW DOUBT IT, OLD FRIEND!
MY SENSORS COMPUTE THAT WE ARE ON A CARIBBEAN ISLE, IN THE TIME OF BLACKBEARD THE PIRATE!
NUTS! I'DA WOWED 'EM IN MIAMI!
HEY, THERE'S A BUNCHA PIRATES! LOOKS LIKE THEY'RE DIVVYIN' UP SOME STOLEN LOOT!
WE'RE TOO CONSPICUOUS LIKE THIS!
STAY HIDDEN WHILE I GET US SOME CLOTHES!
IT'S NOT SAKS FIFTH AVENUE, BUT IT'LL HAVE TO DO!
SHEESH! EAT YER HEART OUT, CHARLETON HESTON!
I'M NOT CERTAIN THESE CLOTHES REFLECT THE REAL ME!
DO YOU SEE WHAT I SEE?
JUST WHAT WE NEED!
SEIZE THEM!
AND SO...
I DON'T GIT IT, STRETCHO! WHY'DJA LET 'EM GRAB US?
SIMPLE! IT WAS THE FASTEST WAY TO GET ABOARD!

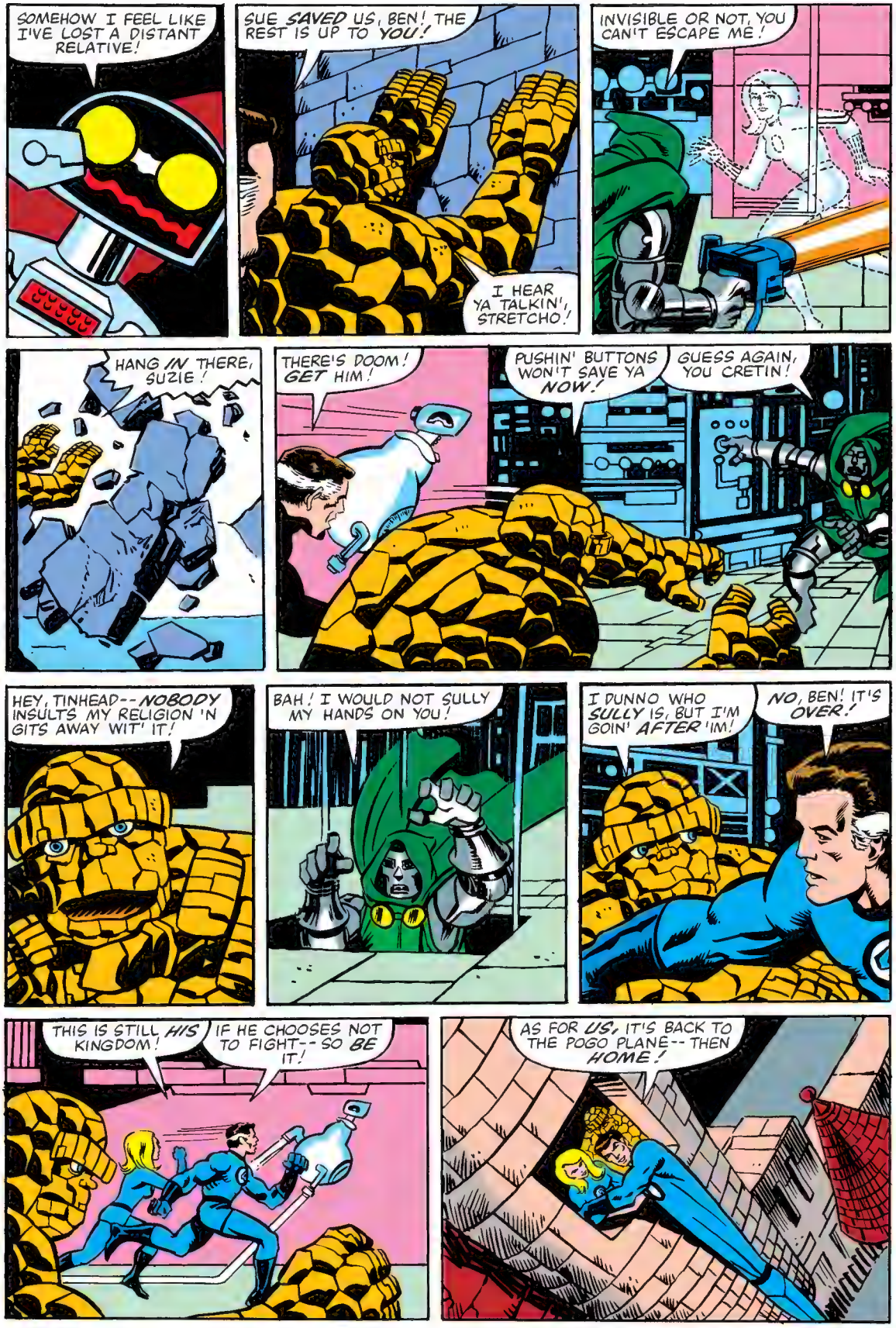
GOOD WORK, ME HEARTIES! WE SHANGHAIED US THREE NEW CREW MEMBERS!
ALTHOUGH THE LITTLE ONE'S TOO PUNY TO BE GOOD FOR MUCH!
I BEG YOUR PARDON!
GRAB A MOP, MATES! THERE'S A DECK TO BE SCRUBBED!
SORRY, GENTLEMEN! I SPECIALIZE IN TASKS THAT ARE MORE CEREBRAL!
THE LITTLE ONE FLIES!
AND THAT'S NOT ALL WE CAN DO--
YEOOWWWWW
THE TALL ONE STRETCHES!
BUT WAIT TILL YOU SEE WHAT THE HEAVY ONE DOES--
AW, SHUCKS! I DON'T DO NUTHIN' THAT ANY BRAVE, POWERFUL, DARING SUPER HERO WOULDN'T DO!
I JUST DO IT BETTER!
NO MORE! NO MORE! WE SURRENDER!
WE CANNOT BATTLE DEMONS!

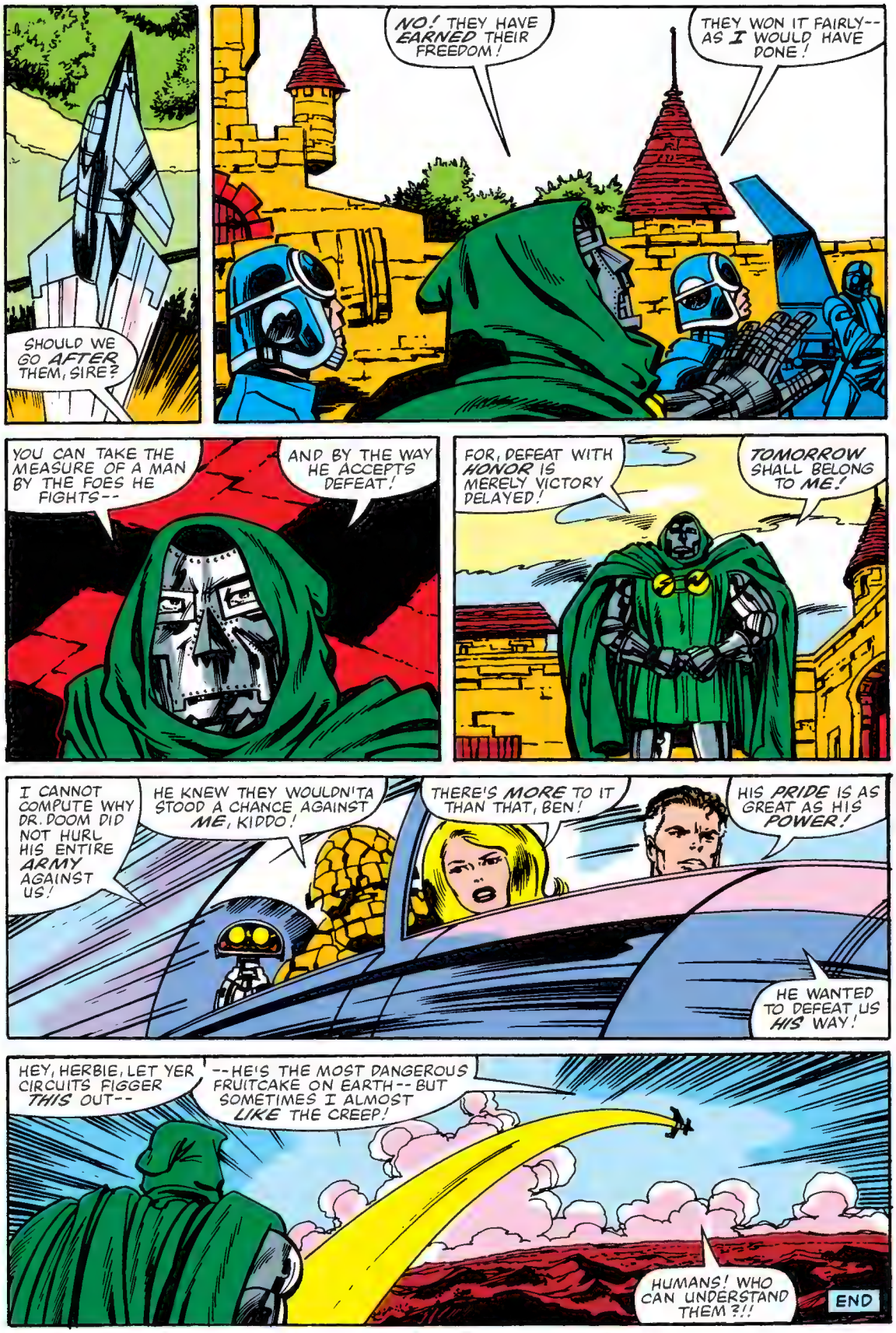
ALL HAIL OUR NEW LEADER-- MIGHTY BLACKBEARD! GREATEST PIRATE OF THEM ALL!
IT'S INCREDIBLE! WE WERE SEARCHING FOR BLACKBEARD'S TREASURE-- AND DUE TO AN AMAZING PARADOX OF TIME--
YOU YOURSELF HAVE BECOME THE FAMOUS PIRATE!
I ALWAYS KNOWED I'D BE A LIVIN' LEGEND!
BEN, COMMAND YOUR CREW TO BRING YOU THEIR STOLEN TREASURE!
HERBIE AND I WILL SEARCH FOR CAPTIVES!
YOU HEARD THE MAN, YA SWABS!
HEY, HOWCUM IT TAKES TWO OF YA TA CARRY ONE CRUMMY TWO-HUNDRED POUND CHEST?
CAPTAIN, THE SHIP IS YOURS AGAIN! THE PIRATES HAVE DECIDED TO GIVE THEMSELVES UP!
WHO HAS WORKED THIS MIRACLE?
YOU WOULDN'T BELIEVE IT!
I CAN HARDLY BELIEVE IT MYSELF!
HEY, STRETCHO! LOOKA WHAT'S STASHED IN HERE! WE'RE RICH!
SORRY, BEN-- WE CANNOT KEEP IT!
YER OUTTA YER GOURD IF YA EXPECT ME TA BRING IT TA DR. DOO--
NO! I'VE A BETTER IDEA!

REED RICHARDS CAN BE VERY PERSUASIVE...
I OUGHTTA HAVE M'HEAD EXAMINED FER DOIN' THIS!
WHUT ABOUT THAT CREEP DOOM?
LEAVE IT TO ME! WE WON'T RETURN TO HIM EMPTY-HANDED!
WHAT IF OUR IRON-ARMORED FOE LEAVES US IN THE PAST?
HE WON'T! EVIL THOUGH HE IS, HIS WORD IS HIS BOND!
:PTOOEY!: YOU GUYS KEEP TALKIN', AND I DO THE CARRYIN'!
AT LAST! THERE'S THE SPOT WE LANDED AT!
QUICK! RETURN TO NORMAL!
THE TREASURE CHEST! IT MEANS THEY'VE SUCCEEDED!
AT LAST! THE WEALTH OF BLACKBEARD SHALL BE MINE!
KLIK!
MY SENSORS COMPUTE THAT WE ARE RETURNING TO THE PRESENT!
BIG DEAL! ANY IDJIT CAN TELL BY OPENIN' HIS EYES!
YOUR MISSION IS ENDED! YOU'VE BROUGHT ME MY PRIZE!
YES! WE KEPT OUR PART OF THE BARGAIN!
NOW KEEP YOURS! WHERE IS SUE STORM!
SHE IS SAFE! SHE WILL BE RETURNED TO YOU!
THE LORD OF LATVERIA DOES NOT BREAK HIS WORD!


MY SENSES COMPUTE DANGER WHEN THE CHEST IS OPENED!
I AIN'T EXACTLY FAMOUS FER MY PATIENCE!
WE'RE WAITING, DOOM!
BRING FORTH THE FEMALE!
BEN! REED! I KNEW YOU WOULDN'T FAIL!
I'M SUCCESS-FUL TOO, MISS STORM!
CAREFUL, SUE! WE'RE STILL IN DANGER!
AND NOW TO SAVOR MY-- WHAT'S THIS?!!
WORTHLESS ROCKS! YOU'VE TRIED TO DECEIVE ME!
NO! WE PROMISED TO BRING YOU BLACKBEARD'S TREASURE CHEST! WE BROUGHT YOU THE CHEST!
IT WAS THE TREASURE I WANTED! YOU KNEW THAT!
WE KEPT OUR WORD!
YOU TRICKED ME! NOW YOU'LL PAY THE PRICE!
REED!
HE CAN'T HELP YOU! MY GIANT ROBOT WILL DESTROY HIM-- AND THE ORANGE-SKINNED OAF, AS WELL!
OTHERS HAVE TRIED BEFORE--AND FAILED!
SHEESH! THE MORE I TRY'N CLOBBER THIS TIN TURKEY, THE MORE HE SEEMS TA LIKE IT!
THIS AIN'T DOIN' MY CONFIDENCE NO GOOD!
BREAK AWAY FROM HIM-- WHILE YOU CAN! HE'S TOO POWERFUL FOR YOU!


I'LL USE MY ARM TO LASSO HIM--GET HIM OFF-BALANCE!
I-I CAN'T! HIS STRENGTH IS ALMOST LIMITLESS!
HE MUST HAVE A WEAK SPOT! MY SENSORS WILL PROBE FOR IT!
THE FOOLS! THEY HAVEN'T A CHANCE!
DOOM HAS FORGOTTEN ABOUT ME! THE ARROGANT CHAUVINIST CAN'T BE BOTHERED BY A MERE FEMALE!
WELL, THAT'S HIS MISTAKE!
THEN, AS DOOM FEEDS HIS ROBOT STILL MORE POWER...
MR. RICHARDS! MR. GRIMM! SAVE YOURSELVES! HE'S OUT FOR THE KILL!
THIS HAS TO WORK! I WON'T GET A SECOND CHANCE!
THE GIRL! SHE'S GONE!
NOT EXACTLY, DOOM! I'M JUST INVISIBLE!
AHH! THIS IS THE BUTTON I NEED!
SOMETHING HAPPENED TO THE CURRENT! IT'S A SHORT CIRCUIT!
THE ROBOT--HE'S FALLING!


SOMEHOW I FEEL LIKE I'VE LOST A DISTANT RELATIVE!
SUE SAVED US, BEN! THE REST IS UP TO YOU!
I HEAR YA TALKIN', STRETCHO!
INVISIBLE OR NOT, YOU CAN'T ESCAPE ME!
HANG IN THERE, SUZIE!
THERE'S DOOM! GET HIM!
PUSHIN' BUTTONS WON'T SAVE YA NOW!
GUESS AGAIN, YOU CRETIN!
HEY, TINHEAD--NOBODY INSULTS MY RELIGION 'N GITS AWAY WIT' IT!
BAH! I WOULD NOT SULLY MY HANDS ON YOU!
I DUNNO WHO SULLY IS, BUT I'M GOIN' AFTER 'IM!
NO, BEN! IT'S OVER!
THIS IS STILL HIS KINGDOM!
IF HE CHOOSES NOT TO FIGHT--SO BE IT!
AS FOR US, IT'S BACK TO THE POGO PLANE--THEN HOME!


SHOULD WE GO AFTER THEM, SIRE?
NO! THEY HAVE EARNED THEIR FREEDOM!
THEY WON IT FAIRLY-- AS I WOULD HAVE DONE!
YOU CAN TAKE THE MEASURE OF A MAN BY THE FOES HE FIGHTS--
AND BY THE WAY HE ACCEPTS DEFEAT!
FOR, DEFEAT WITH HONOR IS MERELY VICTORY DELAYED!
TOMORROW SHALL BELONG TO ME!
I CANNOT COMPUTE WHY DR. DOOM DID NOT HURL HIS ENTIRE ARMY AGAINST US!
HE KNEW THEY WOULDN'TA STOOD A CHANCE AGAINST ME, KIDDO!
THERE'S MORE TO IT THAN THAT, BEN!
HIS PRIDE IS AS GREAT AS HIS POWER!
HE WANTED TO DEFEAT US HIS WAY!
HEY, HERBIE, LET YER CIRCUITS FIGGER THIS OUT--
--HE'S THE MOST DANGEROUS FRUITCAKE ON EARTH-- BUT SOMETIMES I ALMOST LIKE THE CREEP!
HUMANS! WHO CAN UNDERSTAND THEM?!!
END

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"THE EYES HAVE IT!"

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THE EYES HAVE IT!

CATCH YOU GUYS LATER!
COURTESY OF DOCTOR DOOM HERE I'M ABOUT TWO WEEKS LATE FOR A DATE WITH A VERY IMPORTANT LADY, AND IF I DON'T HURRY OVER AND DO SOME WORLD-CLASS APOLOGIZING, IT'LL BE BACK TO THE LONELY-HEARTS CLUB FOR YOURS TRULY!
TAKE CARE, BABY BROTHER!
JOHN BYRNE WORDS AND PICTURES
JIM NOVAK LETTERING
GLYNIS WEIN COLORING
JIM SALICRUP, EDITOR
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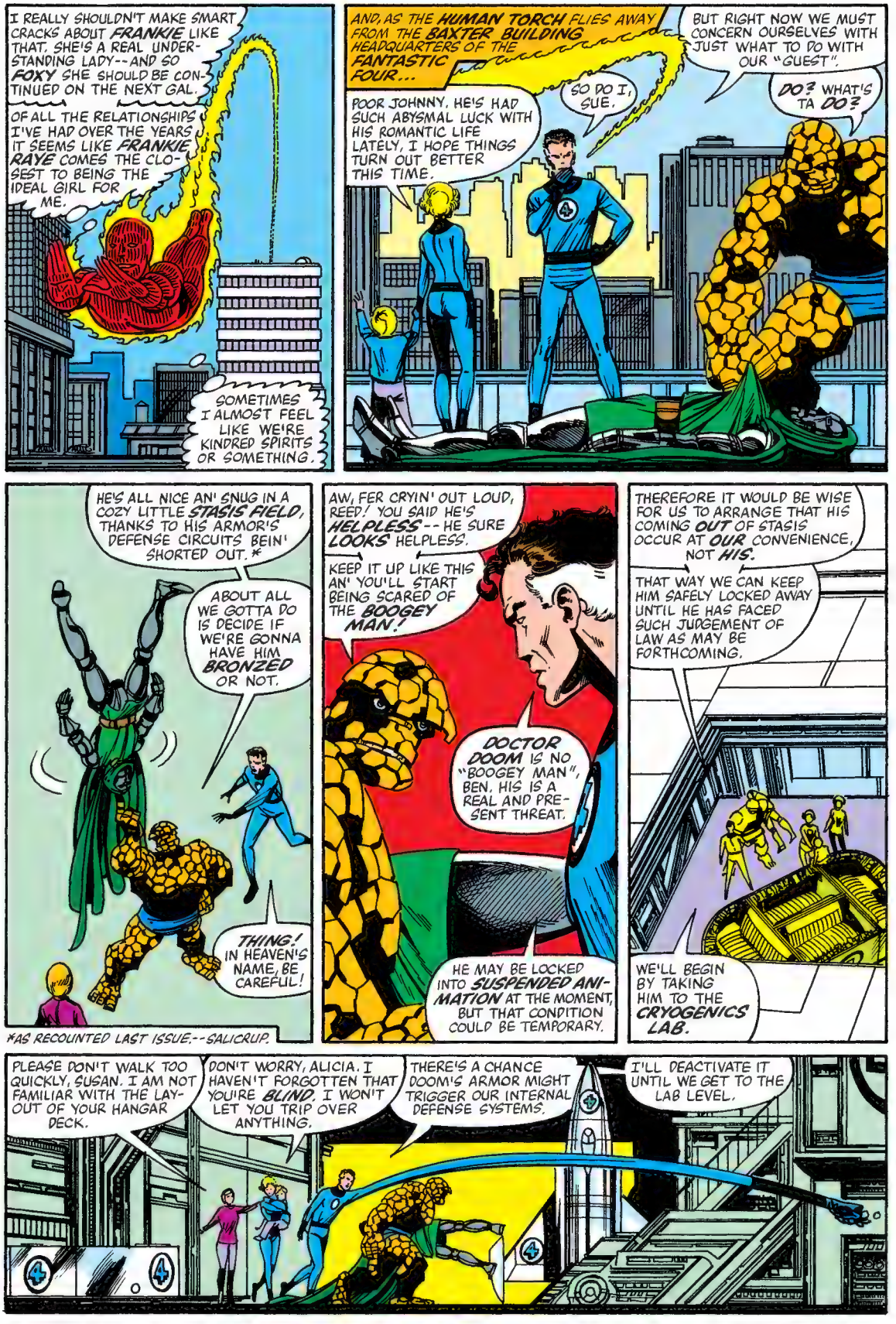
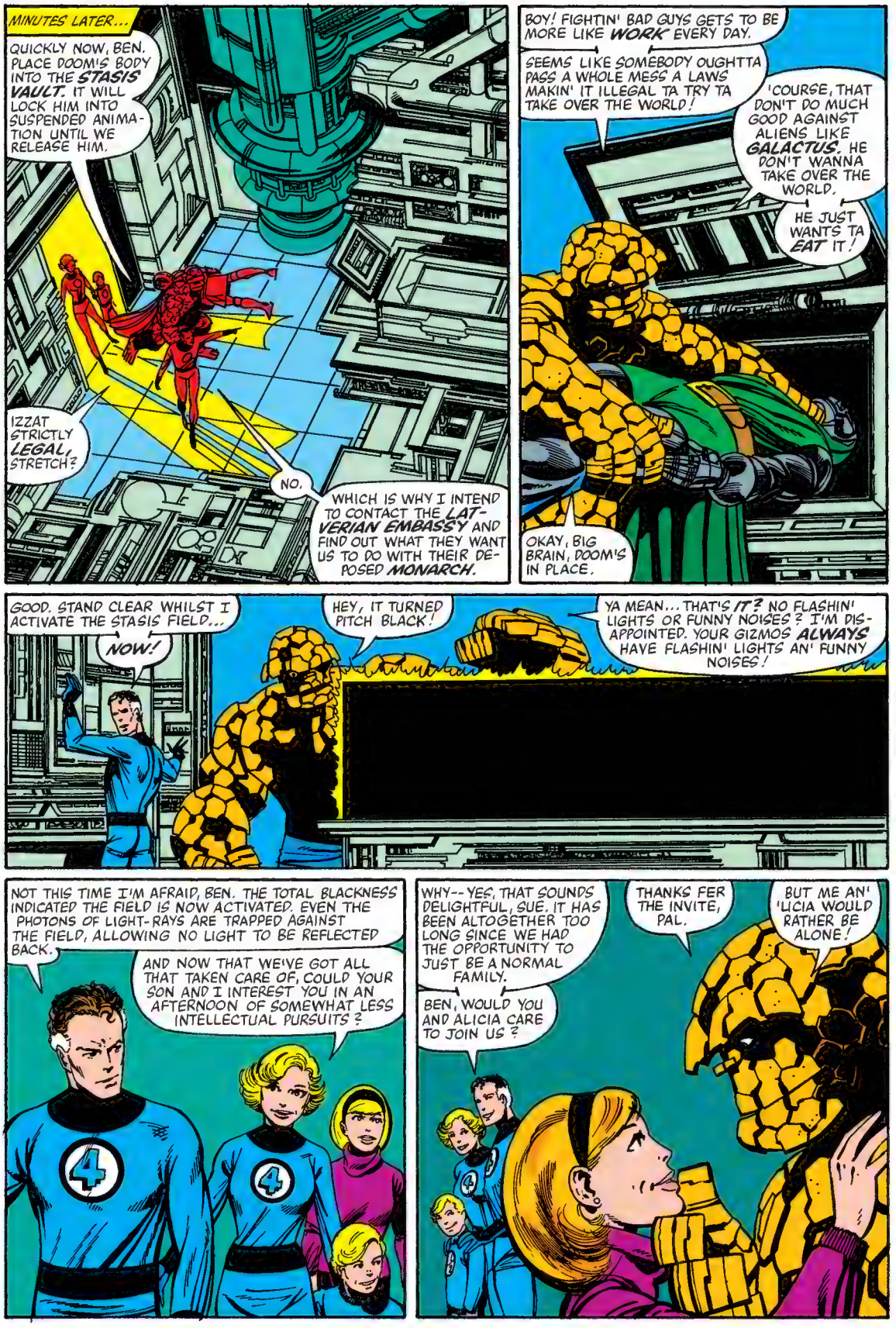
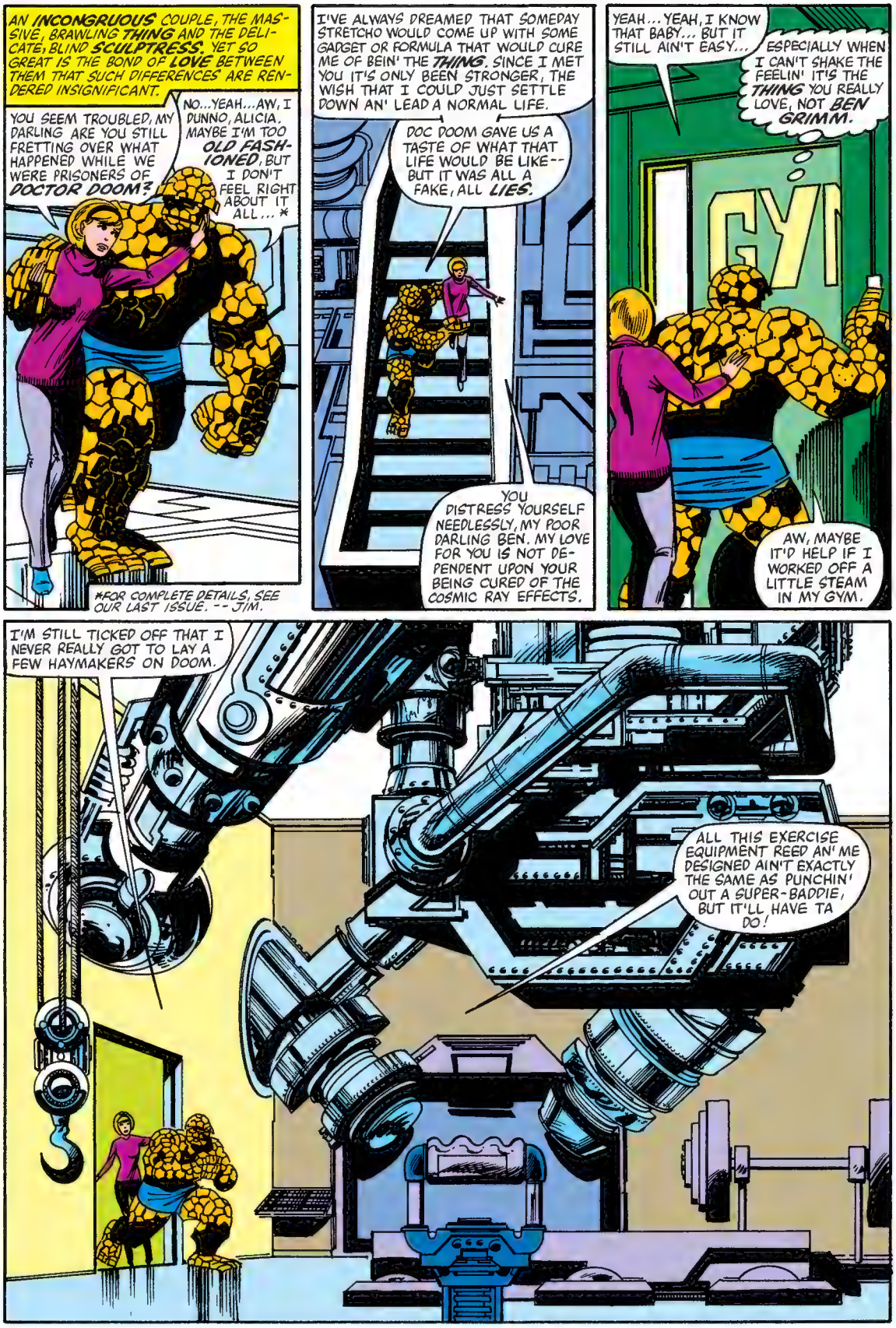
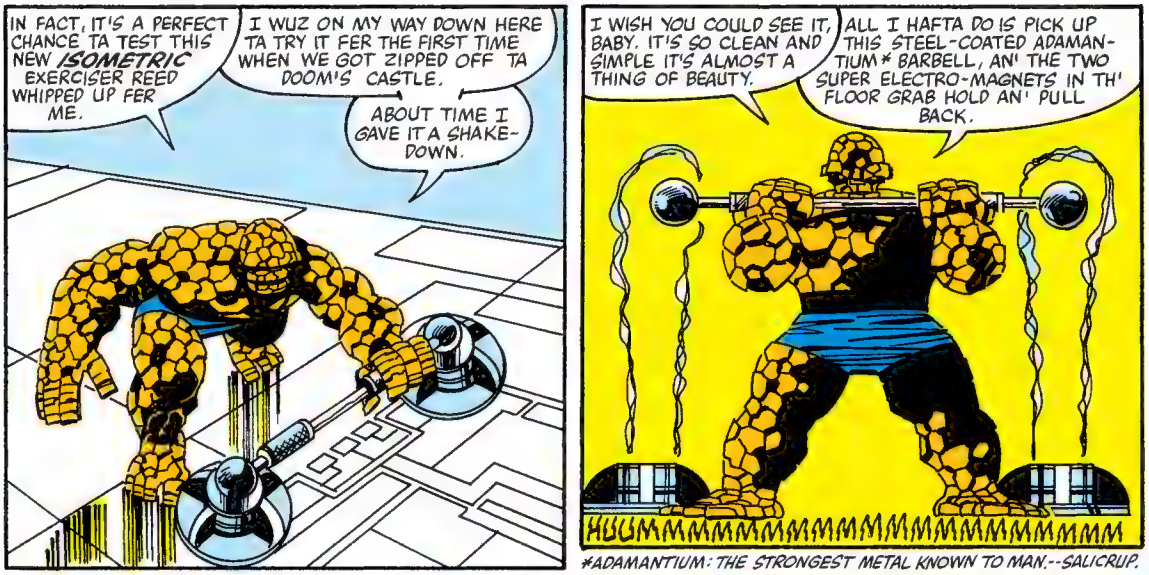
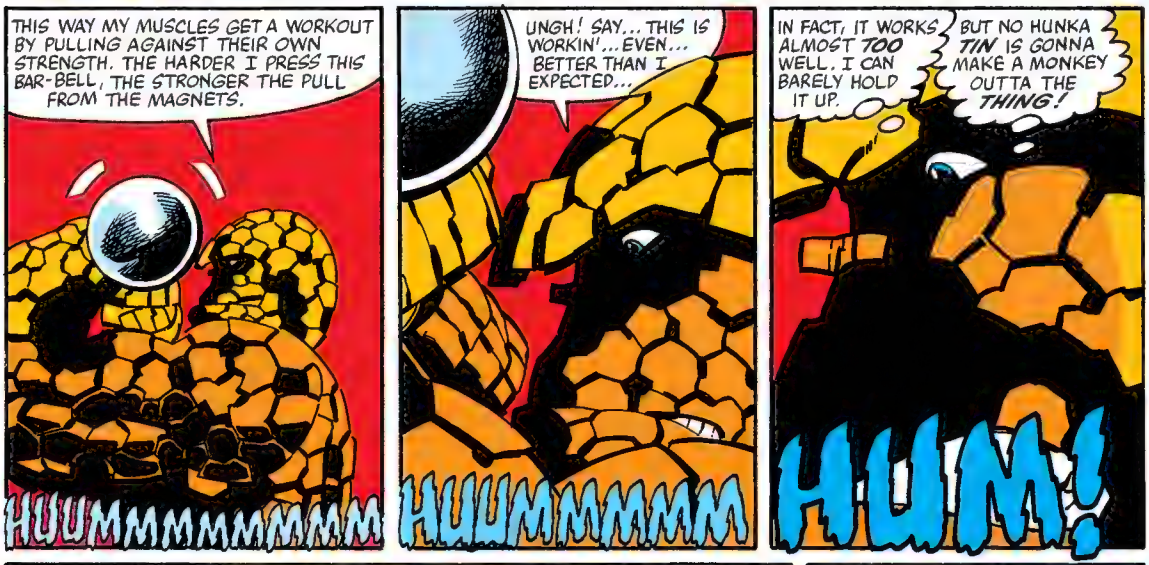

I REALLY SHOULDN'T MAKE SMART CRACKS ABOUT FRANKIE LIKE THAT. SHE'S A REAL UNDERSTANDING LADY--AND SO FOXY SHE SHOULD BE CONTINUED ON THE NEXT GAL.
OF ALL THE RELATIONSHIPS I'VE HAD OVER THE YEARS IT SEEMS LIKE FRANKIE RAYE COMES THE CLOSEST TO BEING THE IDEAL GIRL FOR ME.
SOMETIMES I ALMOST FEEL LIKE WE'RE KINDRED SPIRITS OR SOMETHING.
AND, AS THE HUMAN TORCH FLIES AWAY FROM THE BAXTER BUILDING HEADQUARTERS OF THE FANTASTIC FOUR...
POOR JOHNNY. HE'S HAD SUCH ABYSMAL LUCK WITH HIS ROMANTIC LIFE LATELY. I HOPE THINGS TURN OUT BETTER THIS TIME.
SO DO I, SUE.
BUT RIGHT NOW WE MUST CONCERN OURSELVES WITH JUST WHAT TO DO WITH OUR "GUEST".
DO? WHAT'S TA DO?
HE'S ALL NICE AN' SNUG IN A COZY LITTLE STASIS FIELD, THANKS TO HIS ARMOR'S DEFENSE CIRCUITS BEIN' SHORTED OUT.*
ABOUT ALL WE GOTTA DO IS DECIDE IF WE'RE GONNA HAVE HIM BRONZED OR NOT.
THING! IN HEAVEN'S NAME, BE CAREFUL!
*AS RECOUNTED LAST ISSUE--SALICRUP.
AW, FER CRYIN' OUT LOUD, REED! YOU SAID HE'S HELPLESS--HE SURE LOOKS HELPLESS.
KEEP IT UP LIKE THIS AN' YOU'LL START BEING SCARED OF THE BOOGEY MAN!
DOCTOR DOOM IS NO "BOOGEY MAN", BEN. HIS IS A REAL AND PRESENT THREAT.
HE MAY BE LOCKED INTO SUSPENDED ANIMATION AT THE MOMENT, BUT THAT CONDITION COULD BE TEMPORARY.
THEREFORE IT WOULD BE WISE FOR US TO ARRANGE THAT HIS COMING OUT OF STASIS OCCUR AT OUR CONVENIENCE, NOT HIS.
THAT WAY WE CAN KEEP HIM SAFELY LOCKED AWAY UNTIL HE HAS FACED SUCH JUDGEMENT OF LAW AS MAY BE FORTHCOMING.
WE'LL BEGIN BY TAKING HIM TO THE CRYOGENICS LAB.
PLEASE DON'T WALK TOO QUICKLY, SUSAN. I AM NOT FAMILIAR WITH THE LAYOUT OF YOUR HANGAR DECK.
DON'T WORRY, ALICIA. I HAVEN'T FORGOTTEN THAT YOU'RE BLIND. I WON'T LET YOU TRIP OVER ANYTHING.
THERE'S A CHANCE DOOM'S ARMOR MIGHT TRIGGER OUR INTERNAL DEFENSE SYSTEMS.
I'LL DEACTIVATE IT UNTIL WE GET TO THE LAB LEVEL.

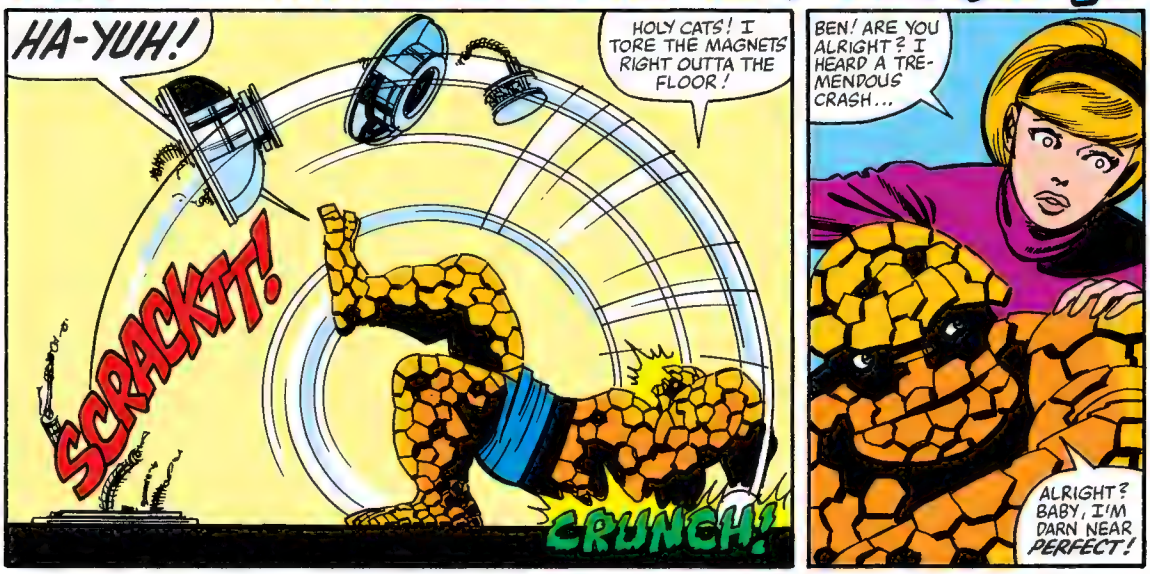

MINUTES LATER...
QUICKLY NOW, BEN. PLACE DOOM'S BODY INTO THE STASIS VAULT. IT WILL LOCK HIM INTO SUSPENDED ANIMATION UNTIL WE RELEASE HIM.
IZZAT STRICTLY LEGAL, STRETCH?
NO.
WHICH IS WHY I INTEND TO CONTACT THE LATVERIAN EMBASSY AND FIND OUT WHAT THEY WANT US TO DO WITH THEIR DEPOSED MONARCH.
BOY! FIGHTIN' BAD GUYS GETS TO BE MORE LIKE WORK EVERY DAY.
SEEMS LIKE SOMEBODY OUGHTTA PASS A WHOLE MESS A LAWS MAKIN' IT ILLEGAL TA TRY TA TAKE OVER THE WORLD!
'COURSE, THAT DON'T DO MUCH GOOD AGAINST ALIENS LIKE GALACTUS. HE DON'T WANNA TAKE OVER THE WORLD.
HE JUST WANTS TA EAT IT!
OKAY, BIG BRAIN, DOOM'S IN PLACE.
GOOD. STAND CLEAR WHILST I ACTIVATE THE STASIS FIELD...
NOW!
HEY, IT TURNED PITCH BLACK!
YA MEAN... THAT'S IT? NO FLASHIN' LIGHTS OR FUNNY NOISES? I'M DISAPPOINTED. YOUR GIZMOS ALWAYS HAVE FLASHIN' LIGHTS AN' FUNNY NOISES!
NOT THIS TIME I'M AFRAID, BEN. THE TOTAL BLACKNESS INDICATED THE FIELD IS NOW ACTIVATED. EVEN THE PHOTONS OF LIGHT-RAYS ARE TRAPPED AGAINST THE FIELD, ALLOWING NO LIGHT TO BE REFLECTED BACK.
AND NOW THAT WE'VE GOT ALL THAT TAKEN CARE OF, COULD YOUR SON AND I INTEREST YOU IN AN AFTERNOON OF SOMEWHAT LESS INTELLECTUAL PURSUITS?
WHY-- YES, THAT SOUNDS DELIGHTFUL, SUE. IT HAS BEEN ALTOGETHER TOO LONG SINCE WE HAD THE OPPORTUNITY TO JUST BE A NORMAL FAMILY.
BEN, WOULD YOU AND ALICIA CARE TO JOIN US?
THANKS FER THE INVITE, PAL.
BUT ME AN' 'LICIA WOULD RATHER BE ALONE!

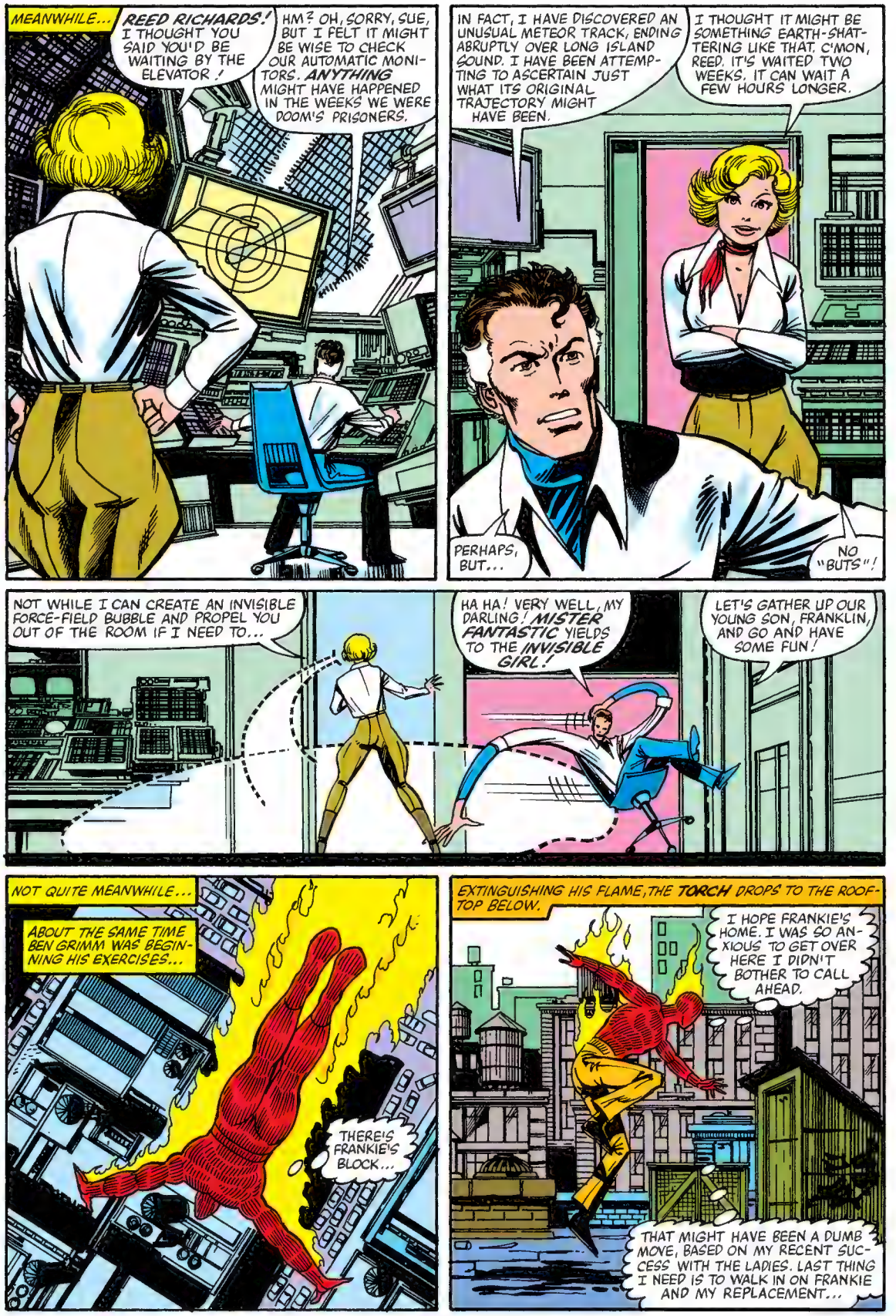

AN INCONGRUOUS COUPLE, THE MASSIVE, BRAWLING THING AND THE DELICATE, BLIND SCULPTRESS. YET SO GREAT IS THE BOND OF LOVE BETWEEN THEM THAT SUCH DIFFERENCES ARE RENDERED INSIGNIFICANT.
YOU SEEM TROUBLED, MY DARLING. ARE YOU STILL FRETTING OVER WHAT HAPPENED WHILE WE WERE PRISONERS OF DOCTOR DOOM?
NO...YEAH...AW, I DUNNO, ALICIA. MAYBE I'M TOO OLD FASHIONED, BUT I DON'T FEEL RIGHT ABOUT IT ALL... *
*FOR COMPLETE DETAILS, SEE OUR LAST ISSUE. -- JIM.
I'VE ALWAYS DREAMED THAT SOMEDAY STRETCHO WOULD COME UP WITH SOME GADGET OR FORMULA THAT WOULD CURE ME OF BEIN' THE THING. SINCE I MET YOU IT'S ONLY BEEN STRONGER, THE WISH THAT I COULD JUST SETTLE DOWN AN' LEAD A NORMAL LIFE.
DOC DOOM GAVE US A TASTE OF WHAT THAT LIFE WOULD BE LIKE-- BUT IT WAS ALL A FAKE, ALL LIES.
YOU DISTRESS YOURSELF NEEDLESSLY, MY POOR DARLING BEN. MY LOVE FOR YOU IS NOT DEPENDENT UPON YOUR BEING CURED OF THE COSMIC RAY EFFECTS.
YEAH... YEAH, I KNOW THAT BABY... BUT IT STILL AIN'T EASY...
ESPECIALLY WHEN I CAN'T SHAKE THE FEELIN' IT'S THE THING YOU REALLY LOVE, NOT BEN GRIMM.
GYM
AW, MAYBE IT'D HELP IF I WORKED OFF A LITTLE STEAM IN MY GYM.
I'M STILL TICKED OFF THAT I NEVER REALLY GOT TO LAY A FEW HAYMAKERS ON DOOM.
ALL THIS EXERCISE EQUIPMENT REED AN' ME DESIGNED AIN'T EXACTLY THE SAME AS PUNCHIN' OUT A SUPER-BADDIE, BUT IT'LL HAVE TA DO!


IN FACT, IT'S A PERFECT CHANCE TA TEST THIS NEW ISOMETRIC EXERCISER REED WHIPPED UP FER ME.
I WUZ ON MY WAY DOWN HERE TA TRY IT FER THE FIRST TIME WHEN WE GOT ZIPPED OFF TA DOOM'S CASTLE.
ABOUT TIME I GAVE IT A SHAKE-DOWN.
I WISH YOU COULD SEE IT, BABY. IT'S SO CLEAN AND SIMPLE IT'S ALMOST A THING OF BEAUTY.
ALL I HAFTA DO IS PICK UP THIS STEEL-COATED ADAMANTIUM* BARBELL, AN' THE TWO SUPER ELECTRO-MAGNETS IN TH' FLOOR GRAB HOLD AN' PULL BACK.
HUUMMMMMMMMMMMMMMMMMMMMM

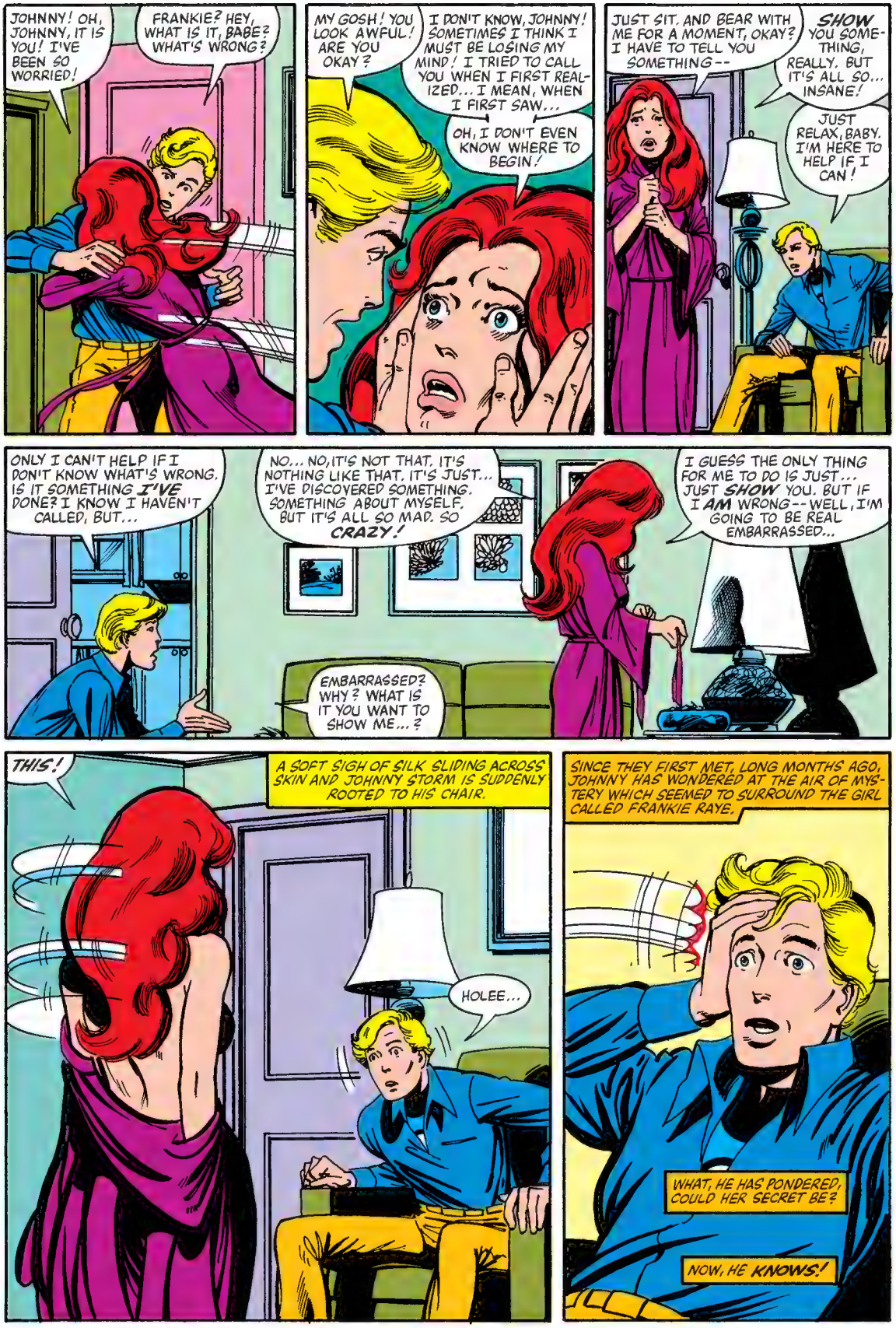
*ADAMANTIUM: THE STRONGEST METAL KNOWN TO MAN.--SALICRUP.

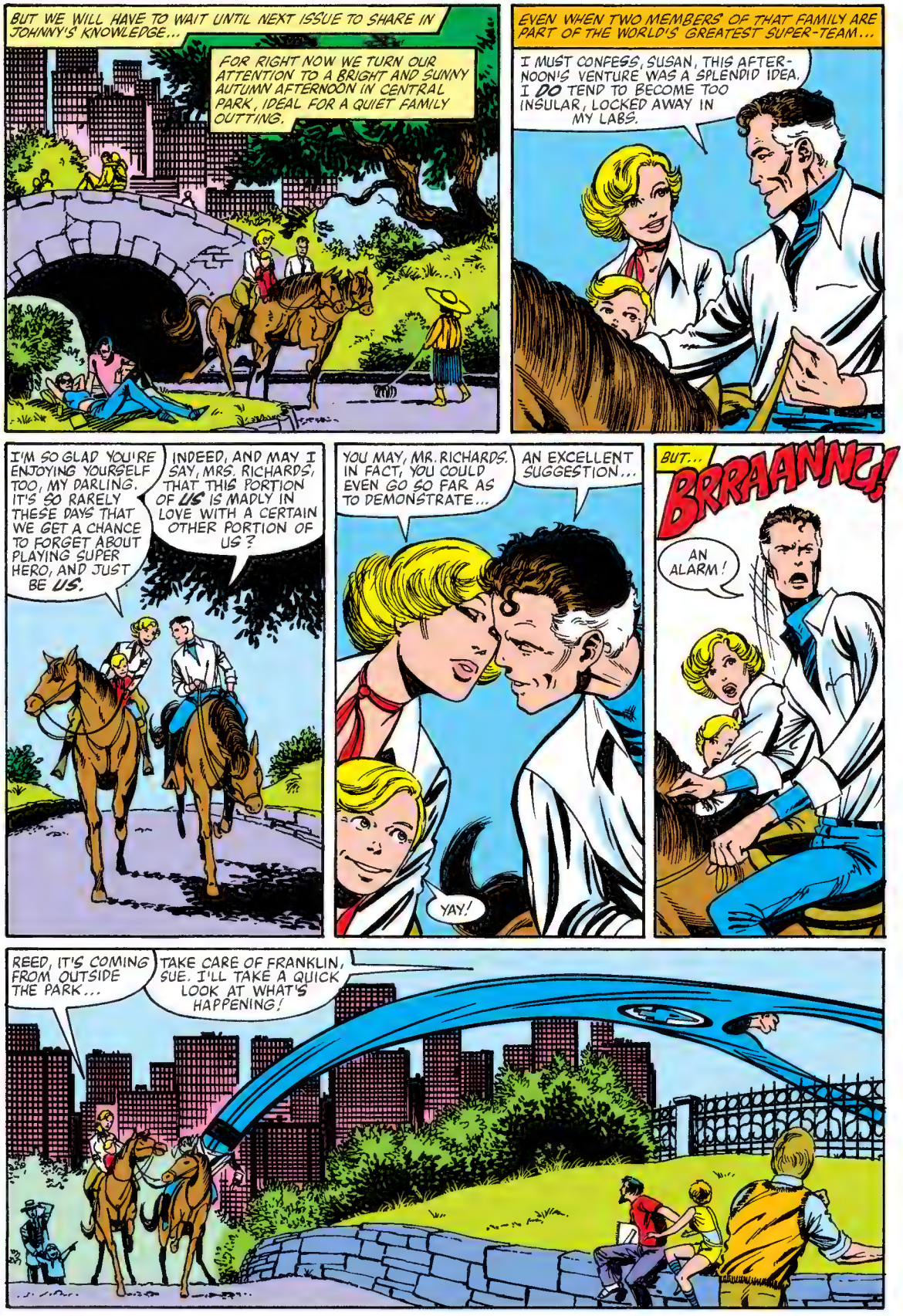

THIS WAY MY MUSCLES GET A WORKOUT BY PULLING AGAINST THEIR OWN STRENGTH. THE HARDER I PRESS THIS BAR-BELL, THE STRONGER THE PULL FROM THE MAGNETS.
HUUMMMMMMMMM
UNGH! SAY... THIS IS WORKIN'... EVEN... BETTER THAN I EXPECTED...
HUUMMMMM
IN FACT, IT WORKS ALMOST TOO WELL. I CAN BARELY HOLD IT UP.
BUT NO HUNKA TIN IS GONNA MAKE A MONKEY OUTTA THE THING!
HUM!

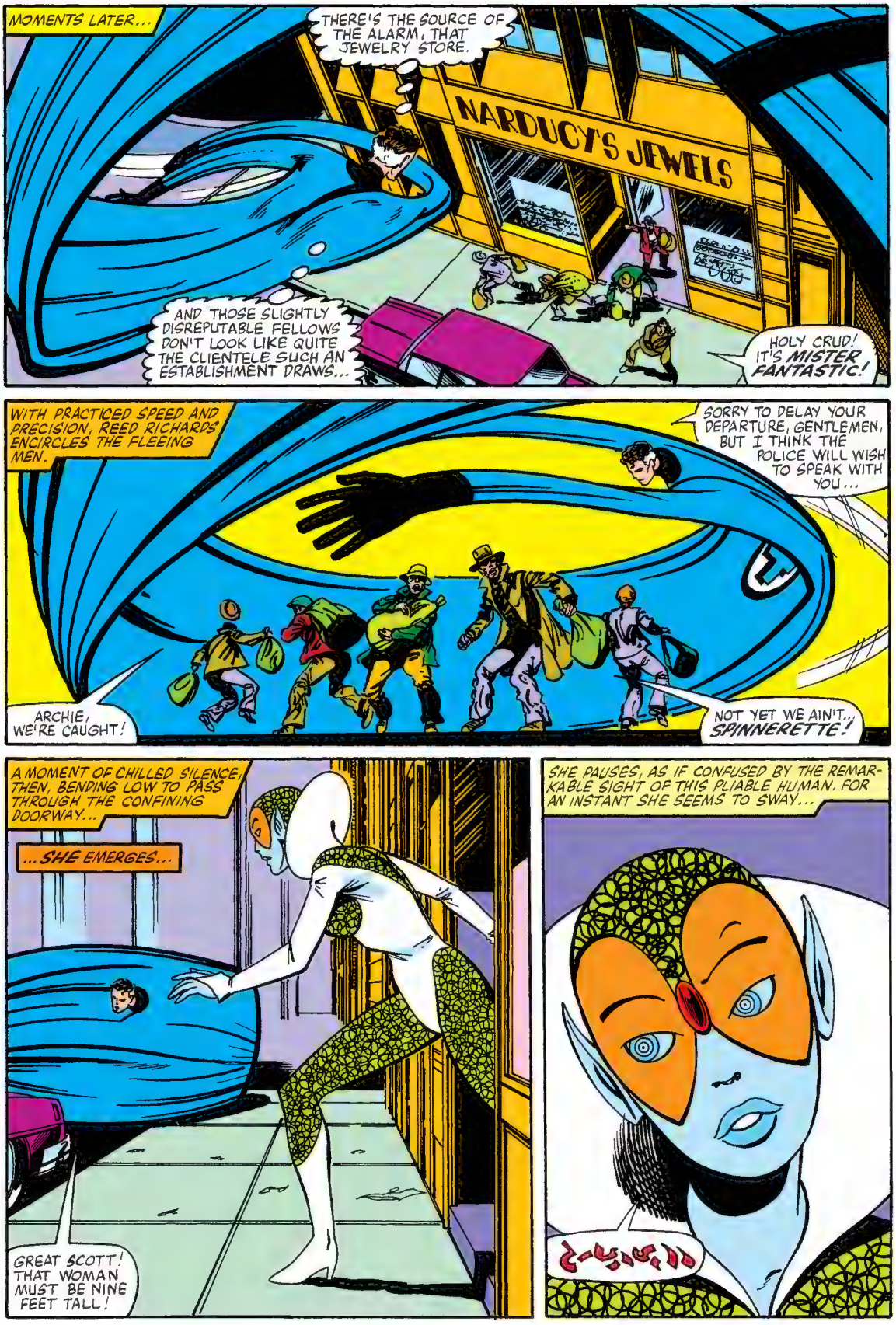

HA-YUH!
SCRACKIT!
HOLY CATS! I TORE THE MAGNETS RIGHT OUTTA THE FLOOR!
CRUNCH!
BEN! ARE YOU ALRIGHT? I HEARD A TREMENDOUS CRASH...
ALRIGHT? BABY, I'M DARN NEAR PERFECT!

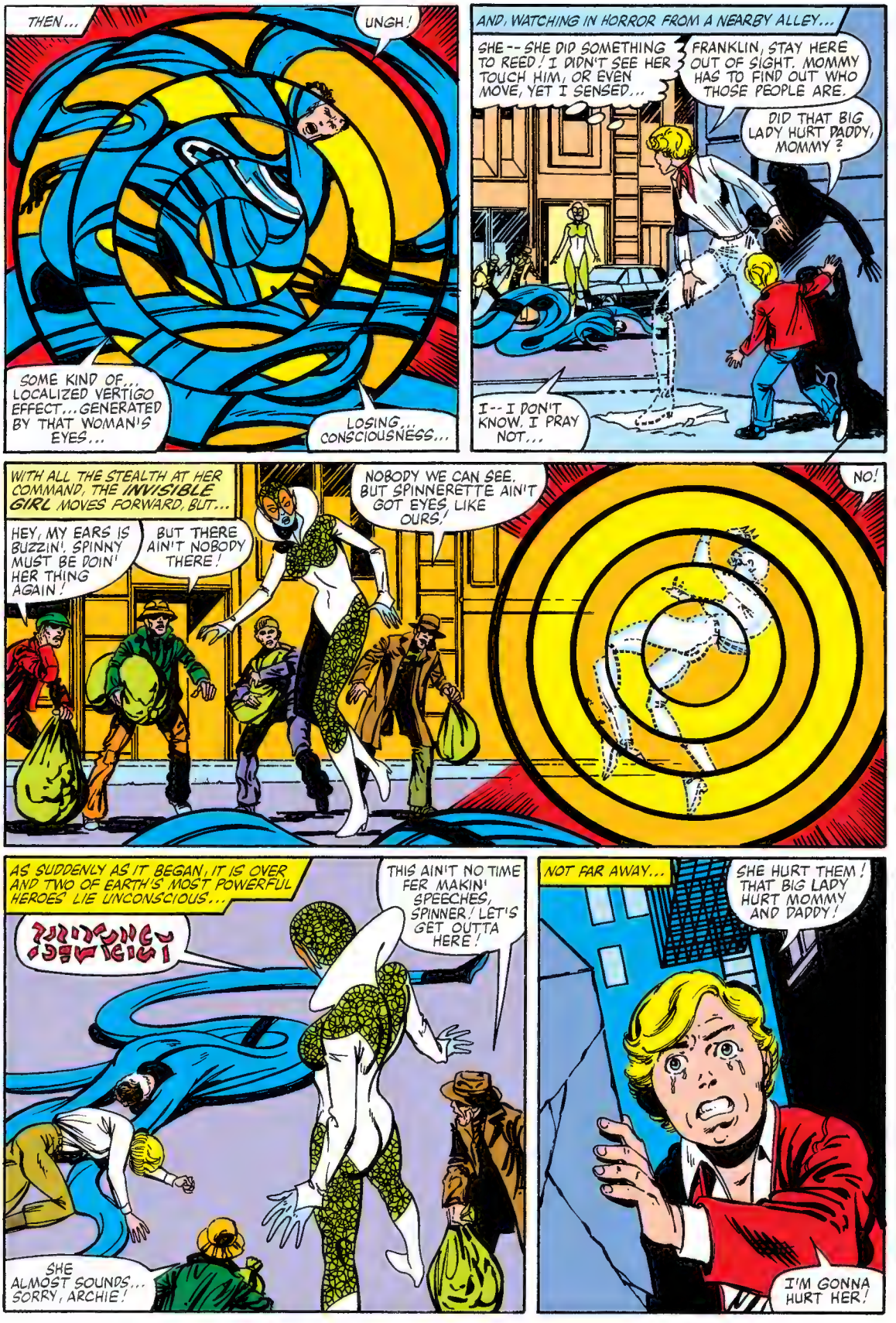

MEANWHILE...
REED RICHARDS! I THOUGHT YOU SAID YOU'D BE WAITING BY THE ELEVATOR!
HM? OH, SORRY, SUE, BUT I FELT IT MIGHT BE WISE TO CHECK OUR AUTOMATIC MONITORS. ANYTHING MIGHT HAVE HAPPENED IN THE WEEKS WE WERE DOOM'S PRISONERS.
IN FACT, I HAVE DISCOVERED AN UNUSUAL METEOR TRACK, ENDING ABRUPTLY OVER LONG ISLAND SOUND. I HAVE BEEN ATTEMPTING TO ASCERTAIN JUST WHAT ITS ORIGINAL TRAJECTORY MIGHT HAVE BEEN.
I THOUGHT IT MIGHT BE SOMETHING EARTH-SHATTERING LIKE THAT. C'MON, REED. IT'S WAITED TWO WEEKS. IT CAN WAIT A FEW HOURS LONGER.
PERHAPS, BUT...
NO "BUTS"!
NOT WHILE I CAN CREATE AN INVISIBLE FORCE-FIELD BUBBLE AND PROPEL YOU OUT OF THE ROOM IF I NEED TO...
HA HA! VERY WELL, MY DARLING! MISTER FANTASTIC YIELDS TO THE INVISIBLE GIRL!
LET'S GATHER UP OUR YOUNG SON, FRANKLIN, AND GO AND HAVE SOME FUN!
NOT QUITE MEANWHILE...
ABOUT THE SAME TIME BEN GRIMM WAS BEGINNING HIS EXERCISES...
THERE'S FRANKIE'S BLOCK...
EXTINGUISHING HIS FLAME, THE TORCH DROPS TO THE ROOFTOP BELOW.
I HOPE FRANKIE'S HOME. I WAS SO ANXIOUS TO GET OVER HERE I DIDN'T BOTHER TO CALL AHEAD.
THAT MIGHT HAVE BEEN A DUMB MOVE, BASED ON MY RECENT SUCCESS WITH THE LADIES. LAST THING I NEED IS TO WALK IN ON FRANKIE AND MY REPLACEMENT...

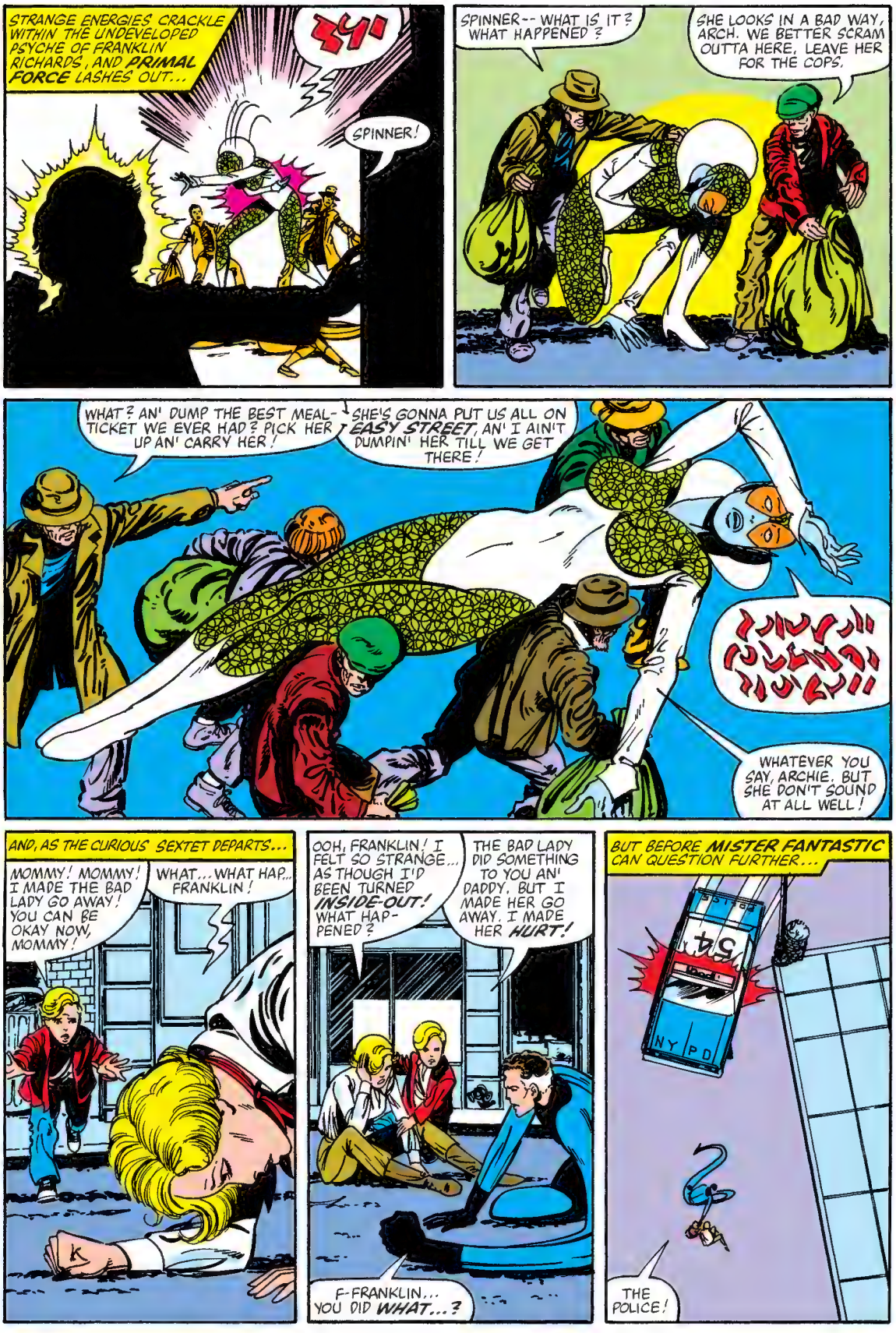
MAYBE THAT'S ALWAYS BEEN MY PROBLEM. I DO TEND TO TAKE MY GIRLFRIENDS FOR GRANTED.
5B
IN THIS MODERN, SUPER-LIBERATED AGE I GUESS NOBODY HAS THE RIGHT TO EXPECT ANYBODY ELSE TO JUST SIT AROUND AWAITING THEIR CONVENIENCE.
5C
BUT I SURE HOPE THAT'S WHAT FRANKIE'S BEEN DOING!
WELL, HERE GOES NOTHING!
NOK NOK
HEL--
HI, WHAT CAN I DO FOR YOU--HEY, I KNOW YOU! YOU'RE JOHNNY STORM, THE HUMAN TORCH, RIGHT? FRANKIE TOLD ME ALL ABOUT YOU. YOU AND HER ARE QUITE THE ITEM, HUH? I'M JULIETTE D'ANGELO--FRIENDS CALL ME JULIE ANGEL. I'M FRANKIE'S ROOMMATE.
RAYE D'ANGE
SORRY I CAN'T STOP AN' CHAT RIGHT NOW BUT I'VE GOT A DRAMA WORKSHOP IN TEN MINUTES AND I'M RUNNING REAL LATE. MAYBE WE COULD ALL HAVE LUNCH SOMETIME.
WELL, CATCH YOU LATER!
--LO?
5C
JOHNNY? IS THAT YOU?

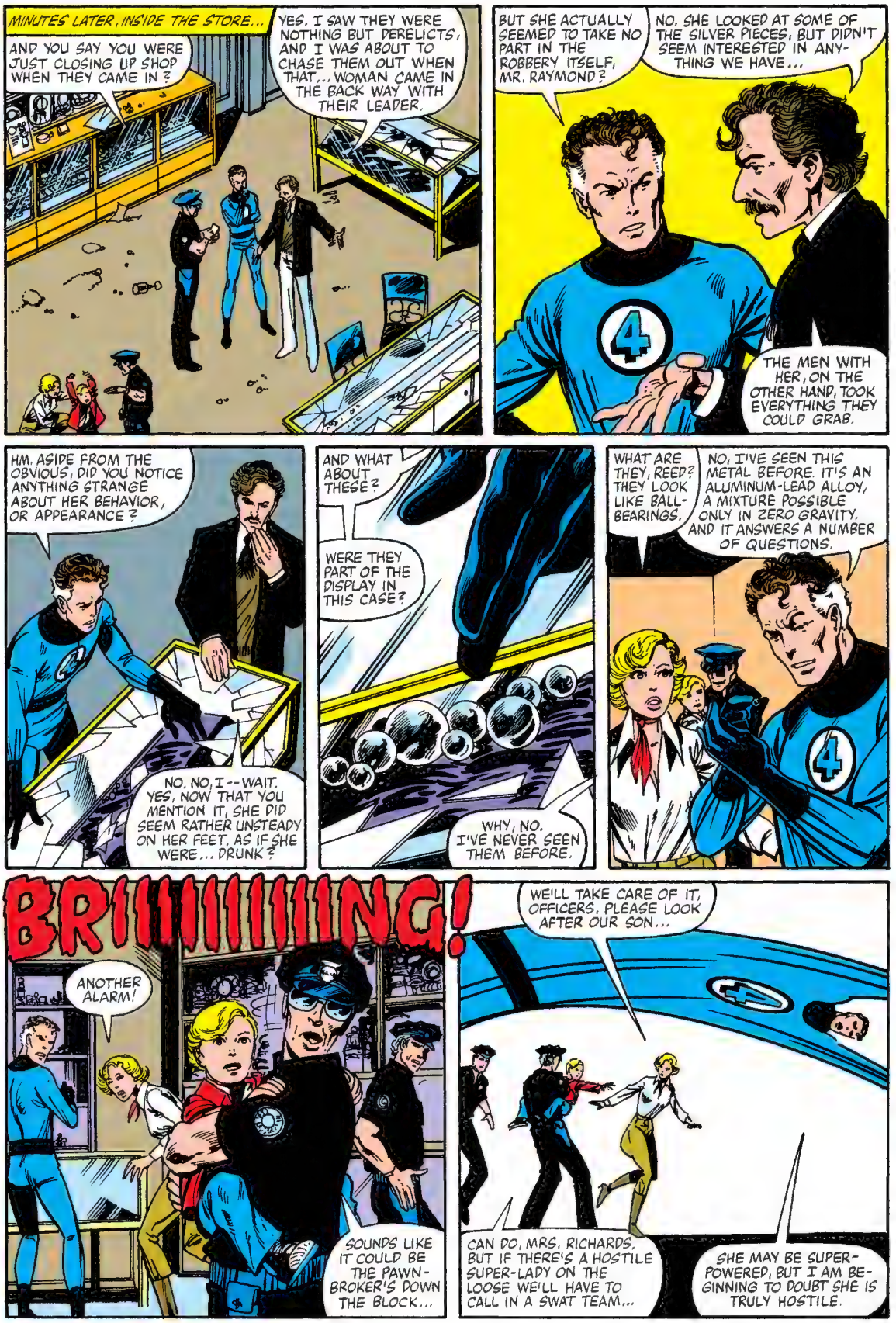

JOHNNY! OH, JOHNNY, IT IS YOU! I'VE BEEN SO WORRIED!
FRANKIE? HEY, WHAT IS IT, BABE? WHAT'S WRONG?
MY GOSH! YOU LOOK AWFUL! ARE YOU OKAY?
I DON'T KNOW, JOHNNY! SOMETIMES I THINK I MUST BE LOSING MY MIND! I TRIED TO CALL YOU WHEN I FIRST REALIZED... I MEAN, WHEN I FIRST SAW...
OH, I DON'T EVEN KNOW WHERE TO BEGIN!
JUST SIT. AND BEAR WITH ME FOR A MOMENT, OKAY? I HAVE TO TELL YOU SOMETHING--
SHOW YOU SOMETHING, REALLY. BUT IT'S ALL SO... INSANE!
JUST RELAX, BABY. I'M HERE TO HELP IF I CAN!
ONLY I CAN'T HELP IF I DON'T KNOW WHAT'S WRONG. IS IT SOMETHING I'VE DONE? I KNOW I HAVEN'T CALLED, BUT...
NO... NO, IT'S NOT THAT. IT'S NOTHING LIKE THAT. IT'S JUST... I'VE DISCOVERED SOMETHING. SOMETHING ABOUT MYSELF. BUT IT'S ALL SO MAD. SO CRAZY!
I GUESS THE ONLY THING FOR ME TO DO IS JUST... JUST SHOW YOU. BUT IF I AM WRONG--WELL, I'M GOING TO BE REAL EMBARRASSED...
EMBARRASSED? WHY? WHAT IS IT YOU WANT TO SHOW ME...?
THIS!
A SOFT SIGH OF SILK SLIDING ACROSS SKIN AND JOHNNY STORM IS SUDDENLY ROOTED TO HIS CHAIR.
HOLEE...
SINCE THEY FIRST MET, LONG MONTHS AGO, JOHNNY HAS WONDERED AT THE AIR OF MYSTERY WHICH SEEMED TO SURROUND THE GIRL CALLED FRANKIE RAYE.
WHAT, HE HAS PONDERED, COULD HER SECRET BE?
NOW, HE KNOWS!


BUT WE WILL HAVE TO WAIT UNTIL NEXT ISSUE TO SHARE IN JOHNNY'S KNOWLEDGE...
FOR RIGHT NOW WE TURN OUR ATTENTION TO A BRIGHT AND SUNNY AUTUMN AFTERNOON IN CENTRAL PARK, IDEAL FOR A QUIET FAMILY OUTTING.
EVEN WHEN TWO MEMBERS OF THAT FAMILY ARE PART OF THE WORLD'S GREATEST SUPER-TEAM...
I MUST CONFESS, SUSAN, THIS AFTERNOON'S VENTURE WAS A SPLENDID IDEA. I DO TEND TO BECOME TOO INSULAR, LOCKED AWAY IN MY LABS.
I'M SO GLAD YOU'RE ENJOYING YOURSELF TOO, MY DARLING. IT'S SO RARELY THESE DAYS THAT WE GET A CHANCE TO FORGET ABOUT PLAYING SUPER HERO, AND JUST BE US.
INDEED, AND MAY I SAY, MRS. RICHARDS, THAT THIS PORTION OF US IS MADLY IN LOVE WITH A CERTAIN OTHER PORTION OF US?
YOU MAY, MR. RICHARDS. IN FACT, YOU COULD EVEN GO SO FAR AS TO DEMONSTRATE...
AN EXCELLENT SUGGESTION...
YAY!
BUT...
BRRAANNG!
AN ALARM!
REED, IT'S COMING FROM OUTSIDE THE PARK...
TAKE CARE OF FRANKLIN, SUE. I'LL TAKE A QUICK LOOK AT WHAT'S HAPPENING!

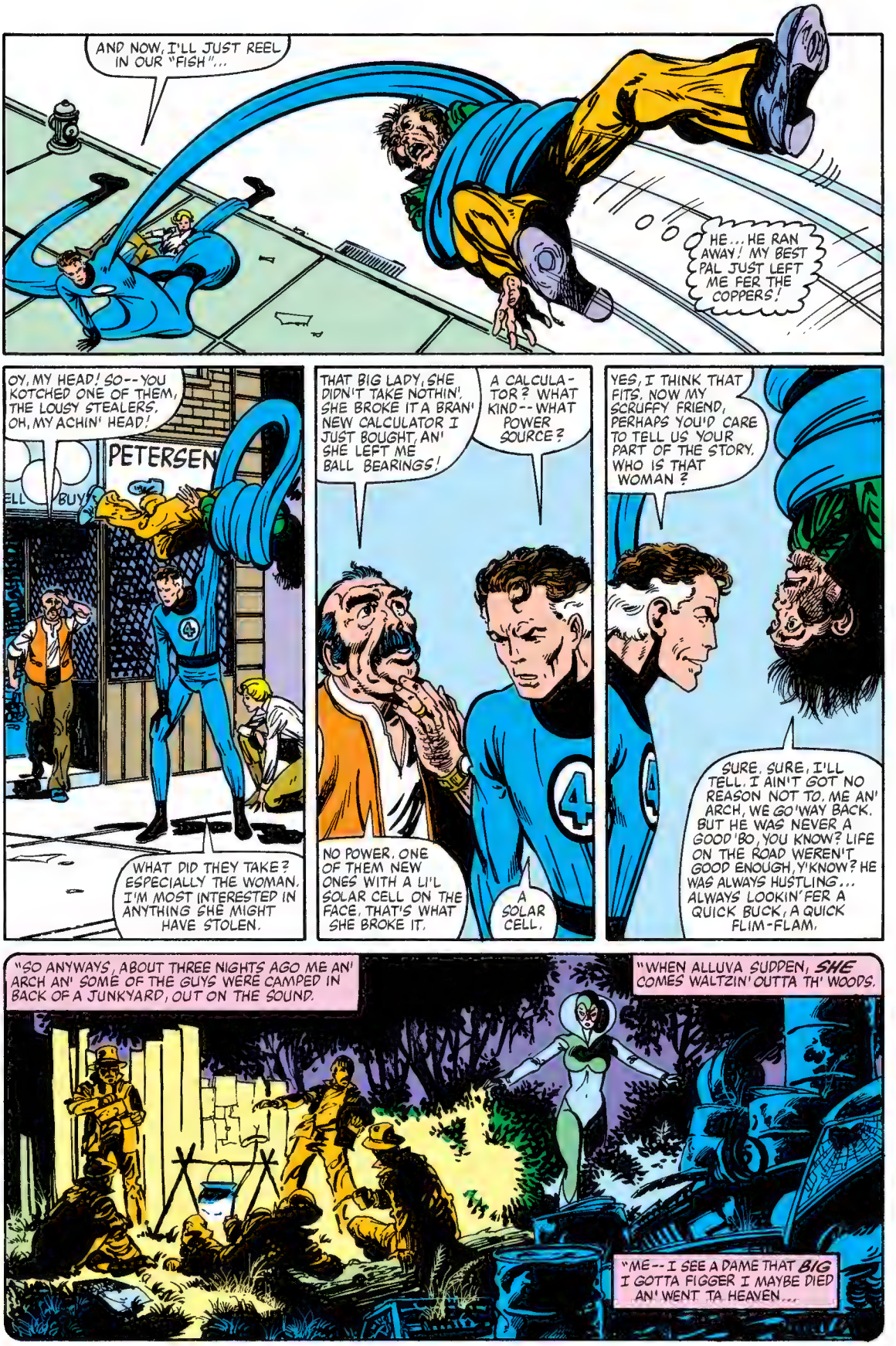

MOMENTS LATER...
THERE'S THE SOURCE OF THE ALARM, THAT JEWELRY STORE.
NARDUCY'S JEWELS
AND THOSE SLIGHTLY DISREPUTABLE FELLOWS DON'T LOOK LIKE QUITE THE CLIENTELE SUCH AN ESTABLISHMENT DRAWS...
HOLY CRUD! IT'S MISTER FANTASTIC!
WITH PRACTICED SPEED AND PRECISION, REED RICHARDS ENCIRCLES THE FLEEING MEN.
SORRY TO DELAY YOUR DEPARTURE, GENTLEMEN, BUT I THINK THE POLICE WILL WISH TO SPEAK WITH YOU...
ARCHIE, WE'RE CAUGHT!
NOT YET WE AIN'T... SPINNERETTE!
A MOMENT OF CHILLED SILENCE, THEN, BENDING LOW TO PASS THROUGH THE CONFINING DOORWAY...
...SHE EMERGES...
GREAT SCOTT! THAT WOMAN MUST BE NINE FEET TALL!
SHE PAUSES, AS IF CONFUSED BY THE REMARKABLE SIGHT OF THIS PLIABLE HUMAN. FOR AN INSTANT SHE SEEMS TO SWAY...


THEN...
UNGH!
SOME KIND OF... LOCALIZED VERTIGO EFFECT... GENERATED BY THAT WOMAN'S EYES...
LOSING... CONSCIOUSNESS...
AND, WATCHING IN HORROR FROM A NEARBY ALLEY...
SHE -- SHE DID SOMETHING TO REED! I DIDN'T SEE HER TOUCH HIM, OR EVEN MOVE, YET I SENSED...
FRANKLIN, STAY HERE OUT OF SIGHT. MOMMY HAS TO FIND OUT WHO THOSE PEOPLE ARE.
DID THAT BIG LADY HURT DADDY, MOMMY?
I -- I DON'T KNOW. I PRAY NOT...
WITH ALL THE STEALTH AT HER COMMAND, THE INVISIBLE GIRL MOVES FORWARD, BUT...
HEY, MY EARS IS BUZZIN'. SPINNY MUST BE DOIN' HER THING AGAIN!
BUT THERE AIN'T NOBODY THERE!
NOBODY WE CAN SEE. BUT SPINNERETTE AIN'T GOT EYES LIKE OURS!
NO!
AS SUDDENLY AS IT BEGAN, IT IS OVER AND TWO OF EARTH'S MOST POWERFUL HEROES LIE UNCONSCIOUS...
THIS AIN'T NO TIME FER MAKIN' SPEECHES, SPINNER! LET'S GET OUTTA HERE!
SHE ALMOST SOUNDS... SORRY, ARCHIE!
NOT FAR AWAY...
SHE HURT THEM! THAT BIG LADY HURT MOMMY AND DADDY!
I'M GONNA HURT HER!

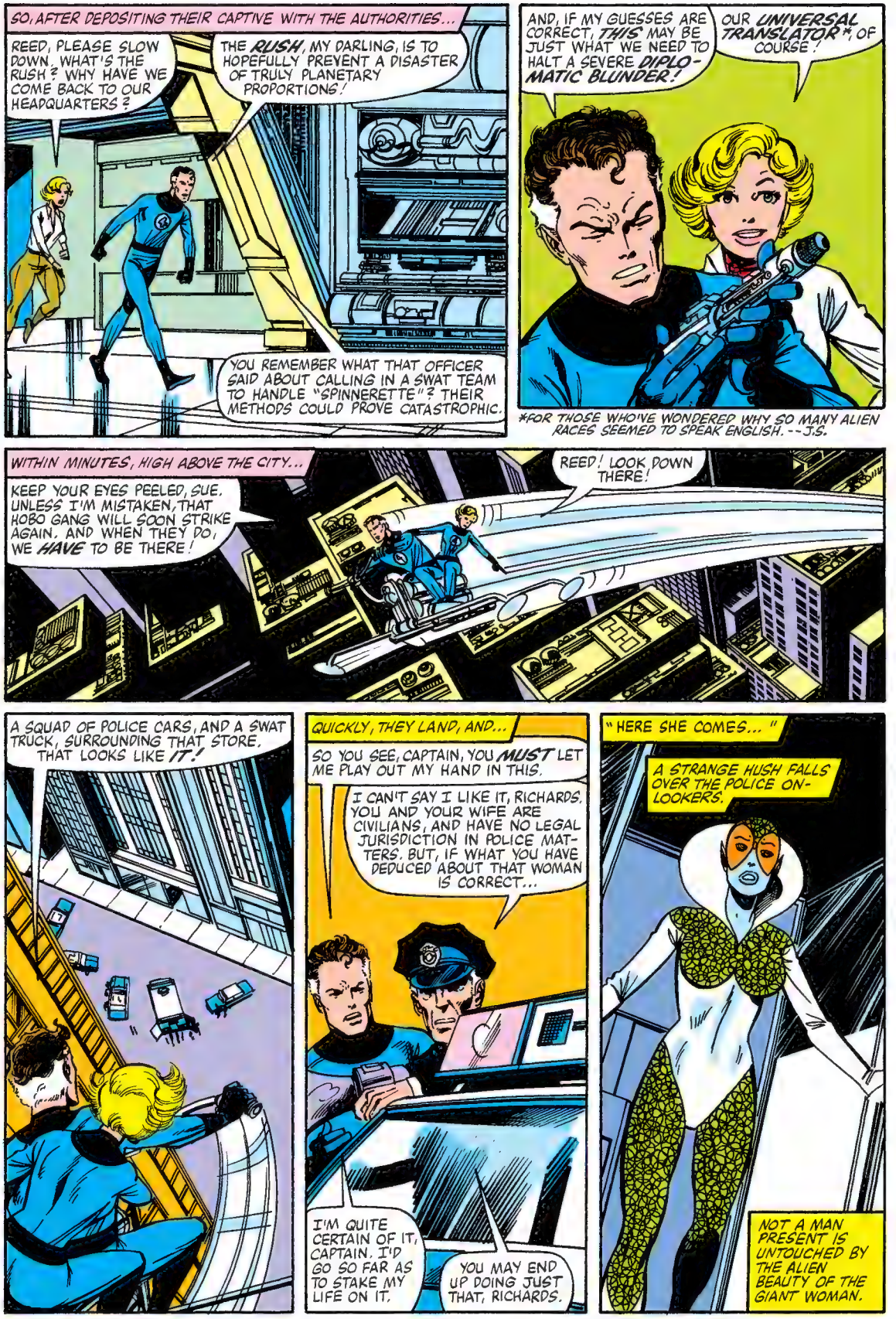

STRANGE ENERGIES CRACKLE WITHIN THE UNDEVELOPED PSYCHE OF FRANKLIN RICHARDS, AND PRIMAL FORCE LASHES OUT...
ZAP!
SPINNER!
SPINNER-- WHAT IS IT? WHAT HAPPENED?
SHE LOOKS IN A BAD WAY, ARCH. WE BETTER SCRAM OUTTA HERE, LEAVE HER FOR THE COPS.
WHAT? AN' DUMP THE BEST MEAL-TICKET WE EVER HAD? PICK HER UP AN' CARRY HER!
SHE'S GONNA PUT US ALL ON EASY STREET, AN' I AIN'T DUMPIN' HER TILL WE GET THERE!
WHATEVER YOU SAY, ARCHIE. BUT SHE DON'T SOUND AT ALL WELL!
AND, AS THE CURIOUS SEXTET DEPARTS...
MOMMY! MOMMY! I MADE THE BAD LADY GO AWAY! YOU CAN BE OKAY NOW, MOMMY!
WHAT... WHAT HAP... FRANKLIN!
OOH, FRANKLIN! I FELT SO STRANGE... AS THOUGH I'D BEEN TURNED INSIDE-OUT! WHAT HAP-PENED?
THE BAD LADY DID SOMETHING TO YOU AN' DADDY. BUT I MADE HER GO AWAY. I MADE HER HURT!
F-FRANKLIN... YOU DID WHAT...?
BUT BEFORE MISTER FANTASTIC CAN QUESTION FURTHER...
54
NYPD
THE POLICE!

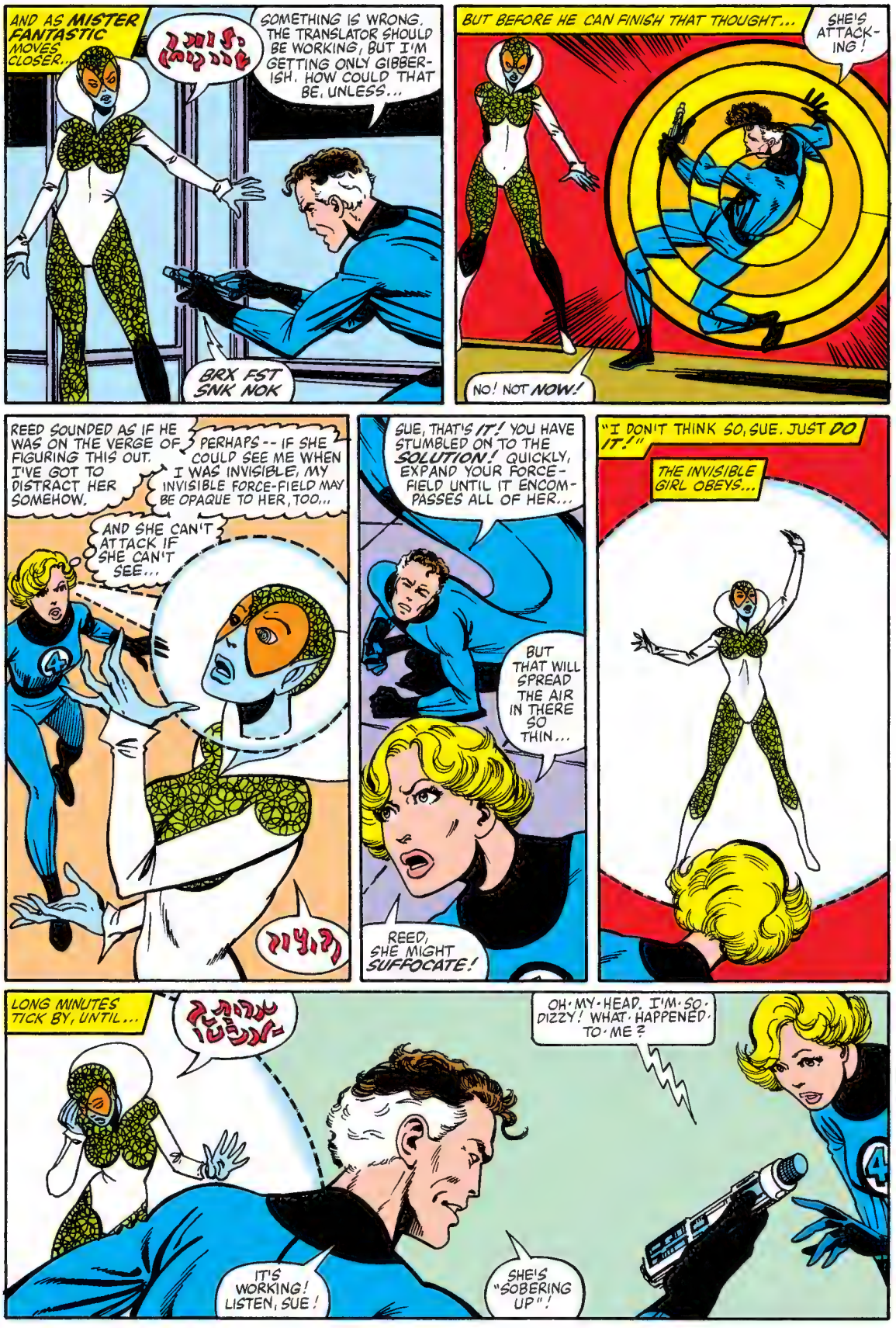

MINUTES LATER, INSIDE THE STORE...
AND YOU SAY YOU WERE JUST CLOSING UP SHOP WHEN THEY CAME IN?
YES. I SAW THEY WERE NOTHING BUT DERELICTS, AND I WAS ABOUT TO CHASE THEM OUT WHEN THAT... WOMAN CAME IN THE BACK WAY WITH THEIR LEADER.
BUT SHE ACTUALLY SEEMED TO TAKE NO PART IN THE ROBBERY ITSELF, MR. RAYMOND?
NO. SHE LOOKED AT SOME OF THE SILVER PIECES, BUT DIDN'T SEEM INTERESTED IN ANY-THING WE HAVE...
THE MEN WITH HER, ON THE OTHER HAND, TOOK EVERYTHING THEY COULD GRAB.
HM. ASIDE FROM THE OBVIOUS, DID YOU NOTICE ANYTHING STRANGE ABOUT HER BEHAVIOR, OR APPEARANCE?
NO. NO, I--WAIT. YES, NOW THAT YOU MENTION IT, SHE DID SEEM RATHER UNSTEADY ON HER FEET. AS IF SHE WERE... DRUNK?
AND WHAT ABOUT THESE?
WERE THEY PART OF THE DISPLAY IN THIS CASE?
WHY, NO. I'VE NEVER SEEN THEM BEFORE.
WHAT ARE THEY, REED? THEY LOOK LIKE BALL-BEARINGS.
NO, I'VE SEEN THIS METAL BEFORE. IT'S AN ALUMINUM-LEAD ALLOY, A MIXTURE POSSIBLE ONLY IN ZERO GRAVITY. AND IT ANSWERS A NUMBER OF QUESTIONS.
BRIIIIIIIIIING!
ANOTHER ALARM!
SOUNDS LIKE IT COULD BE THE PAWN-BROKER'S DOWN THE BLOCK...
WE'LL TAKE CARE OF IT, OFFICERS. PLEASE LOOK AFTER OUR SON...
CAN DO, MRS. RICHARDS, BUT IF THERE'S A HOSTILE SUPER-LADY ON THE LOOSE WE'LL HAVE TO CALL IN A SWAT TEAM...
SHE MAY BE SUPER-POWERED, BUT I AM BE-GINNING TO DOUBT SHE IS TRULY HOSTILE.

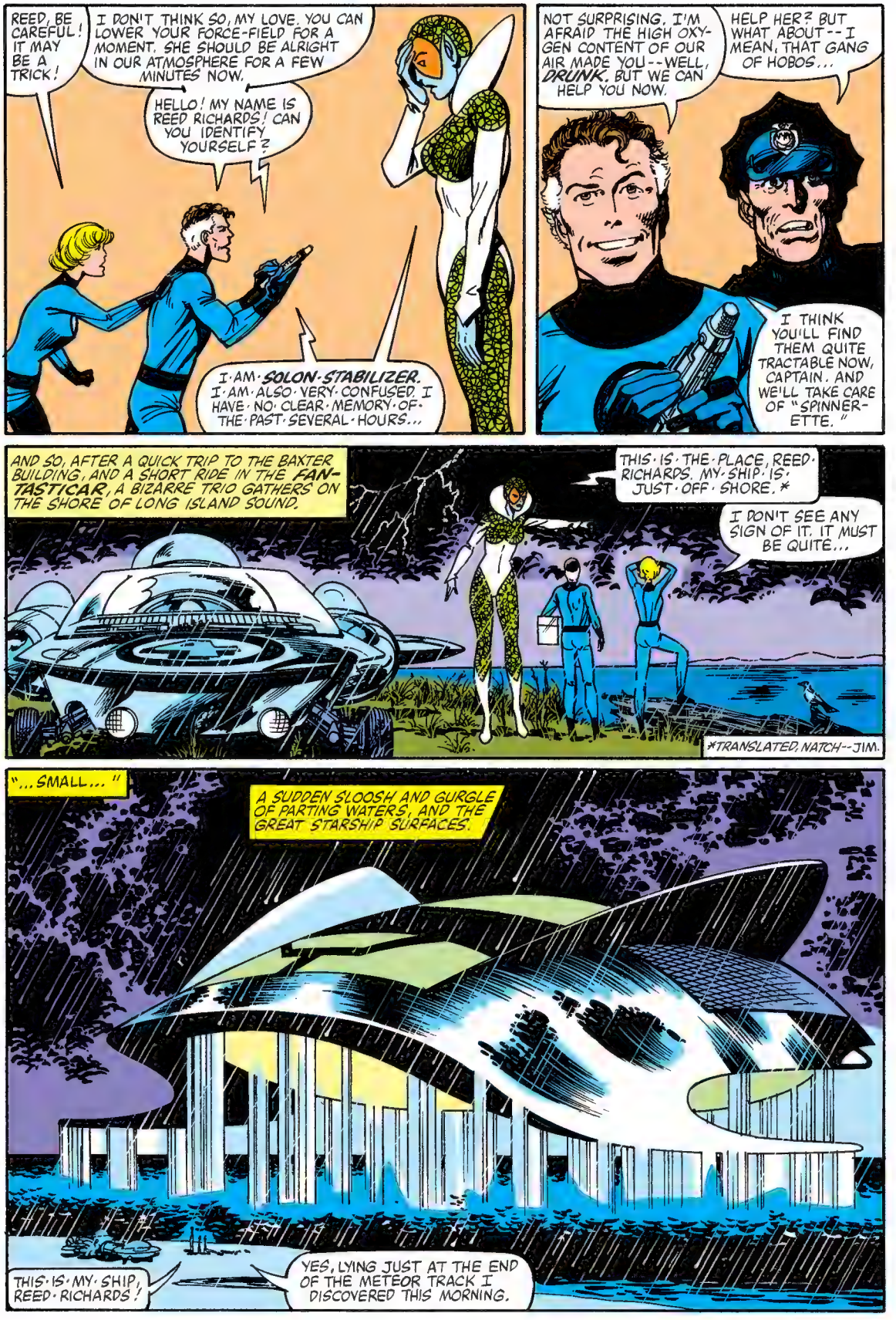
"NOT HOSTILE"? REED, HOW CAN YOU SAY THAT. SHE ATTACKED US. SHE MIGHT HAVE KILLED US IF FRANKLIN HADN'T... STOPPED HER.
I DON'T THINK SO, SUSAN.
I'M BEGINNING TO PIECE TOGETHER A THEORY AS TO THE IDENTITY OF OUR MYSTERY GIANTESS, AND THAT THEORY SUGGESTS SHE MAY BE A VICTIM OF CIRCUMSTANCE.
PETERSEN THE PAWNBROKER
BUY
SELL
ARCH! HERE THEY COME AGAIN!
SO WHAT! SPINNER...
SHE TURNS, FOR A MOMENT ALMOST ON THE VERGE OF STUMBLING...
THEN...
REED! I CAN'T MANEUVER MY FORCE-FIELD IN TIME TO...
BLAST!
I WAS COUNTING ON "SPINNERETTE'S" REACTION TIME BEING SLOWER...
ALTHOUGH DISORIENTED BY THE MYSTERIOUS POWER, REED RICHARDS TWISTS HIS RUBBERY FORM TO CUSHION HIS WIFE...
I WAS CAUGHT ON THE EDGE OF THE EFFECT, THIS TIME. I'M DIZZY...
...BUT I CAN STILL DO THIS!
ARCH! HALP!
ARCHIE! MISTER FANTASTIC SNAGGED SHERM!
LEAVE 'IM! KEEP RUNNIN'!

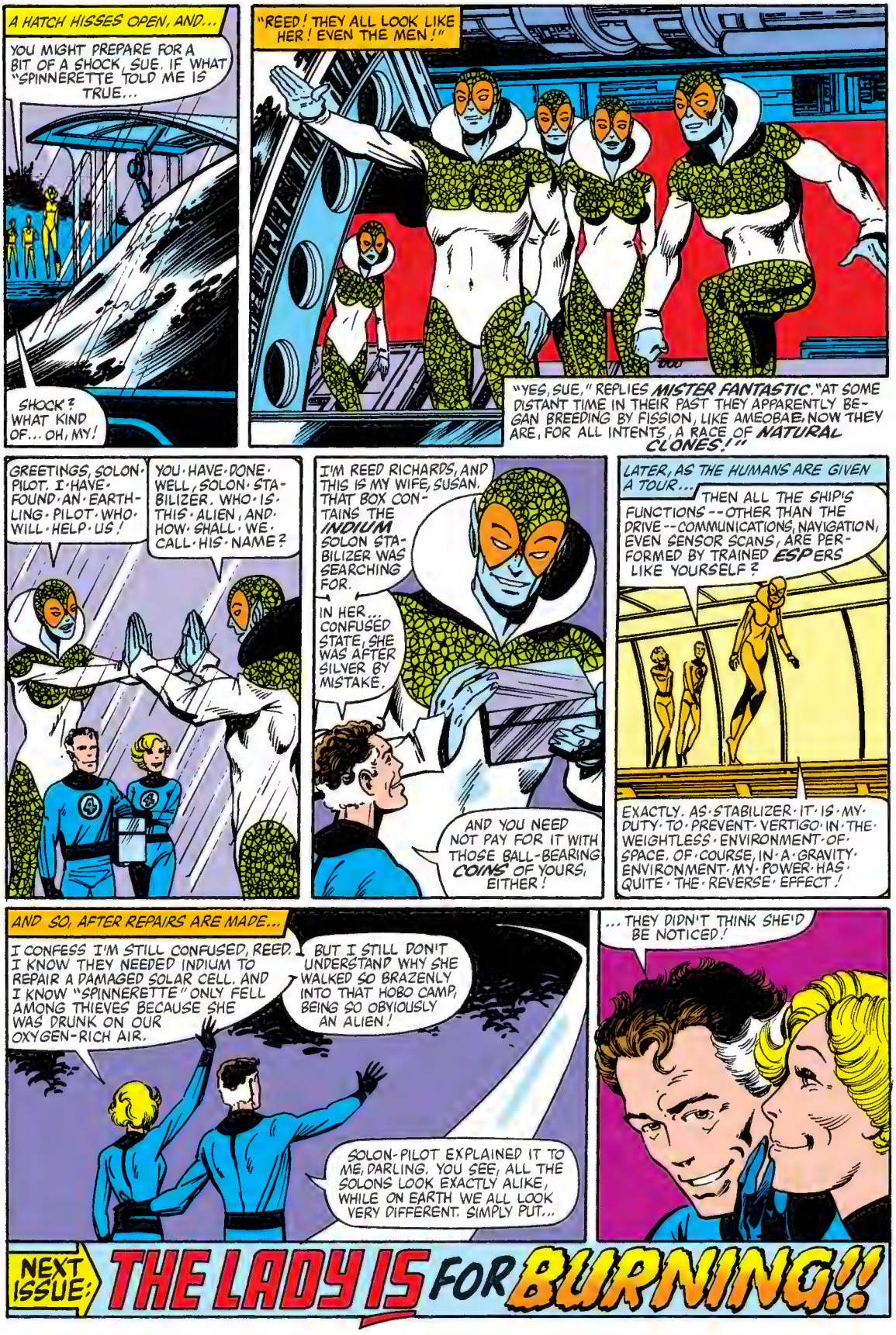

AND NOW, I'LL JUST REEL IN OUR "FISH"...
HE... HE RAN AWAY! MY BEST PAL JUST LEFT ME FER THE COPPERS!
OY, MY HEAD! SO--YOU KOTCHED ONE OF THEM, THE LOUSY STEALERS. OH, MY ACHIN' HEAD!
PETERSEN
BUY
WHAT DID THEY TAKE? ESPECIALLY THE WOMAN. I'M MOST INTERESTED IN ANYTHING SHE MIGHT HAVE STOLEN.
THAT BIG LADY, SHE DIDN'T TAKE NOTHIN'. SHE BROKE IT A BRAN' NEW CALCULATOR I JUST BOUGHT, AN' SHE LEFT ME BALL BEARINGS!
A CALCULATOR? WHAT KIND-- WHAT POWER SOURCE?
NO POWER. ONE OF THEM NEW ONES WITH A LI'L SOLAR CELL ON THE FACE. THAT'S WHAT SHE BROKE IT.
A SOLAR CELL.
YES, I THINK THAT FITS. NOW MY SCRUFFY FRIEND, PERHAPS YOU'D CARE TO TELL US YOUR PART OF THE STORY. WHO IS THAT WOMAN?
SURE, SURE, I'LL TELL. I AIN'T GOT NO REASON NOT TO. ME AN' ARCH, WE GO'WAY BACK. BUT HE WAS NEVER A GOOD 'BO, YOU KNOW? LIFE ON THE ROAD WEREN'T GOOD ENOUGH, Y'KNOW? HE WAS ALWAYS HUSTLING... ALWAYS LOOKIN' FER A QUICK BUCK, A QUICK FLIM-FLAM.
"SO ANYWAYS, ABOUT THREE NIGHTS AGO ME AN' ARCH AN' SOME OF THE GUYS WERE CAMPED IN BACK OF A JUNKYARD, OUT ON THE SOUND.
"WHEN ALLUVA SUDDEN, SHE COMES WALTZIN' OUTTA TH' WOODS.
"ME-- I SEE A DAME THAT BIG I GOTTA FIGGER I MAYBE DIED AN' WENT TA HEAVEN...

"BUT SAM -- HE DON'T TAKE TA STRANGERS... 'SPECIALLY NOT NINE-FOOT BLUE LADIES.
"SHE SEEMED REAL SURPRISED BY WHAT SAM DONE...
"THEN SHE SEEMED REAL MAD...
"AN' THAT WAS THE FIRST TIME WE FOUN' OUT WHAT SHE CAN DO!
"ME AN' ARCHIE WAS THE ONLY ONES THAT WASN'T KAYOED BY WHAT SHE DONE --
"AN ARCHIE -- WELL, HE WAS IN THERE LIKE A DIRTY SHIRT, TRYIN' TA TALK TO HER, LIKE.
"I THOUGHT SURE SHE WAS GONNA ZAP HIM AGAIN, BUT ALLUVA SUDDEN SHE GLOMS ON THIS SILVER WATCH WHAT ARCH STOLE TWO YEARS AGO.
"SHE SEEMED REAL INTERESTED IN THAT WATCH, BOY.
"AN' THEN...
"WELL, THEN WE GOT TA SEE A COUPLE HOURS OF THE STRANGEST CONVERSATION YOU EVER SEEN...
"ARCH WAS DANCIN' ALL OVER, TRYIN' TA MAKE HER UNDERSTAND HIM, AN' TRYIN' TA UNDER-STAND HER...
AN' FINALLY ARCH FIGGERED SHE WAS HERE FER SILVER, AN' HE SAID THAT WAS A QUICK WAY FER US TA GET RICH, WHAT WITH HER POWER. AN' HE CALLED HER "SPINNER-ETTE".
IT ALL FITS SOMEHOW. IT ALL MAKES SENSE. YES...


SO, AFTER DEPOSITING THEIR CAPTIVE WITH THE AUTHORITIES...
REED, PLEASE SLOW DOWN. WHAT'S THE RUSH? WHY HAVE WE COME BACK TO OUR HEADQUARTERS?
THE RUSH, MY DARLING, IS TO HOPEFULLY PREVENT A DISASTER OF TRULY PLANETARY PROPORTIONS!
YOU REMEMBER WHAT THAT OFFICER SAID ABOUT CALLING IN A SWAT TEAM TO HANDLE "SPINNERETTE"? THEIR METHODS COULD PROVE CATASTROPHIC.
AND, IF MY GUESSES ARE CORRECT, THIS MAY BE JUST WHAT WE NEED TO HALT A SEVERE DIPLOMATIC BLUNDER!
OUR UNIVERSAL TRANSLATOR*, OF COURSE!
*FOR THOSE WHO'VE WONDERED WHY SO MANY ALIEN RACES SEEMED TO SPEAK ENGLISH. --J.S.
WITHIN MINUTES, HIGH ABOVE THE CITY...
KEEP YOUR EYES PEELED, SUE. UNLESS I'M MISTAKEN, THAT HOBO GANG WILL SOON STRIKE AGAIN. AND WHEN THEY DO, WE HAVE TO BE THERE!
REED! LOOK DOWN THERE!
A SQUAD OF POLICE CARS, AND A SWAT TRUCK, SURROUNDING THAT STORE, THAT LOOKS LIKE IT!
QUICKLY, THEY LAND, AND...
SO YOU SEE, CAPTAIN, YOU MUST LET ME PLAY OUT MY HAND IN THIS.
I CAN'T SAY I LIKE IT, RICHARDS. YOU AND YOUR WIFE ARE CIVILIANS, AND HAVE NO LEGAL JURISDICTION IN POLICE MATTERS. BUT, IF WHAT YOU HAVE DEDUCED ABOUT THAT WOMAN IS CORRECT...
I'M QUITE CERTAIN OF IT, CAPTAIN. I'D GO SO FAR AS TO STAKE MY LIFE ON IT.
YOU MAY END UP DOING JUST THAT, RICHARDS.
"HERE SHE COMES..."
A STRANGE HUSH FALLS OVER THE POLICE ON-LOOKERS.
NOT A MAN PRESENT IS UNTOUCHED BY THE ALIEN BEAUTY OF THE GIANT WOMAN.


AND AS MISTER FANTASTIC MOVES CLOSER...
SOMETHING IS WRONG. THE TRANSLATOR SHOULD BE WORKING, BUT I'M GETTING ONLY GIBBERISH. HOW COULD THAT BE, UNLESS...
BRX FST SNK NOK
BUT BEFORE HE CAN FINISH THAT THOUGHT...
SHE'S ATTACKING!
NO! NOT NOW!
REED SOUNDED AS IF HE WAS ON THE VERGE OF FIGURING THIS OUT. I'VE GOT TO DISTRACT HER SOMEHOW.
PERHAPS -- IF SHE COULD SEE ME WHEN I WAS INVISIBLE, MY INVISIBLE FORCE-FIELD MAY BE OPAQUE TO HER, TOO...
AND SHE CAN'T ATTACK IF SHE CAN'T SEE...
SUE, THAT'S IT! YOU HAVE STUMBLED ON TO THE SOLUTION! QUICKLY, EXPAND YOUR FORCE-FIELD UNTIL IT ENCOMPASSES ALL OF HER...
BUT THAT WILL SPREAD THE AIR IN THERE SO THIN...
REED, SHE MIGHT SUFFOCATE!
"I DON'T THINK SO, SUE. JUST DO IT!"
THE INVISIBLE GIRL OBEYS...
LONG MINUTES TICK BY, UNTIL...
IT'S WORKING! LISTEN, SUE!
OH·MY·HEAD. I'M·SO·DIZZY! WHAT·HAPPENED·TO·ME?
SHE'S "SOBERING UP"!


REED, BE CAREFUL! IT MAY BE A TRICK!
I DON'T THINK SO, MY LOVE. YOU CAN LOWER YOUR FORCE-FIELD FOR A MOMENT. SHE SHOULD BE ALRIGHT IN OUR ATMOSPHERE FOR A FEW MINUTES NOW.
HELLO! MY NAME IS REED RICHARDS! CAN YOU IDENTIFY YOURSELF?
I AM SOLON STABILIZER. I AM ALSO VERY CONFUSED. I HAVE NO CLEAR MEMORY OF THE PAST SEVERAL HOURS...
NOT SURPRISING, I'M AFRAID THE HIGH OXYGEN CONTENT OF OUR AIR MADE YOU--WELL, DRUNK. BUT WE CAN HELP YOU NOW.
HELP HER? BUT WHAT ABOUT--I MEAN, THAT GANG OF HOBOS...
I THINK YOU'LL FIND THEM QUITE TRACTABLE NOW, CAPTAIN. AND WE'LL TAKE CARE OF "SPINNERETTE."
AND SO, AFTER A QUICK TRIP TO THE BAXTER BUILDING, AND A SHORT RIDE IN THE FANTASTICAR, A BIZARRE TRIO GATHERS ON THE SHORE OF LONG ISLAND SOUND.
THIS IS THE PLACE, REED. RICHARDS. MY SHIP IS JUST OFF SHORE.*
I DON'T SEE ANY SIGN OF IT. IT MUST BE QUITE...
*TRANSLATED, NATCH--JIM.
"...SMALL..."
A SUDDEN SLOOSH AND GURGLE OF PARTING WATERS, AND THE GREAT STARSHIP SURFACES.
THIS IS MY SHIP, REED RICHARDS!
YES, LYING JUST AT THE END OF THE METEOR TRACK I DISCOVERED THIS MORNING.


A HATCH HISSES OPEN, AND...
YOU MIGHT PREPARE FOR A BIT OF A SHOCK, SUE. IF WHAT "SPINNERETTE" TOLD ME IS TRUE...
SHOCK? WHAT KIND OF... OH, MY!
"REED! THEY ALL LOOK LIKE HER! EVEN THE MEN!"
"YES, SUE," REPLIES MISTER FANTASTIC. "AT SOME DISTANT TIME IN THEIR PAST THEY APPARENTLY BEGAN BREEDING BY FISSION, LIKE AMEOBAE. NOW THEY ARE, FOR ALL INTENTS, A RACE OF NATURAL CLONES!"
GREETINGS, SOLON-PILOT. I HAVE FOUND AN EARTHLING PILOT WHO WILL HELP US!
YOU HAVE DONE WELL, SOLON. STABILIZER. WHO IS THIS ALIEN, AND HOW SHALL WE CALL HIS NAME?
I'M REED RICHARDS, AND THIS IS MY WIFE, SUSAN. THAT BOX CONTAINS THE INDIUM SOLON STABILIZER WAS SEARCHING FOR.
IN HER... CONFUSED STATE, SHE WAS AFTER SILVER BY MISTAKE.
AND YOU NEED NOT PAY FOR IT WITH THOSE BALL-BEARING COINS OF YOURS, EITHER!
LATER, AS THE HUMANS ARE GIVEN A TOUR...
THEN ALL THE SHIP'S FUNCTIONS--OTHER THAN THE DRIVE--COMMUNICATIONS, NAVIGATION, EVEN SENSOR SCANS, ARE PERFORMED BY TRAINED ESPERS LIKE YOURSELF?
EXACTLY. AS STABILIZER IT IS MY DUTY TO PREVENT VERTIGO IN THE WEIGHTLESS ENVIRONMENT OF SPACE. OF COURSE, IN A GRAVITY ENVIRONMENT MY POWER HAS QUITE THE REVERSE EFFECT!
AND SO, AFTER REPAIRS ARE MADE...
I CONFESS I'M STILL CONFUSED, REED. I KNOW THEY NEEDED INDIUM TO REPAIR A DAMAGED SOLAR CELL. AND I KNOW "SPINNERETTE" ONLY FELL AMONG THIEVES BECAUSE SHE WAS DRUNK ON OUR OXYGEN-RICH AIR.
BUT I STILL DON'T UNDERSTAND WHY SHE WALKED SO BRAZENLY INTO THAT HOBO CAMP, BEING SO OBVIOUSLY AN ALIEN!
SOLON-PILOT EXPLAINED IT TO ME, DARLING. YOU SEE, ALL THE SOLONS LOOK EXACTLY ALIKE, WHILE ON EARTH WE ALL LOOK VERY DIFFERENT. SIMPLY PUT...
... THEY DIDN'T THINK SHE'D BE NOTICED!
NEXT ISSUE: THE LADY IS FOR BURNING!!

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TM
HONEST! DOCTOR DOOM IS NOT IN THIS MARVEL COMIC!
BUT YOU WILL FIND OUT THE STARTLING SECRET OF FRANKIE RAYE, PLUS A DRAMATIC DEVELOPMENT IN THE LIFE OF THE THING!
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BRUCE AND JUSTIN - GUEST INKER OF A STORY IN THIS CRAZY BOOK!

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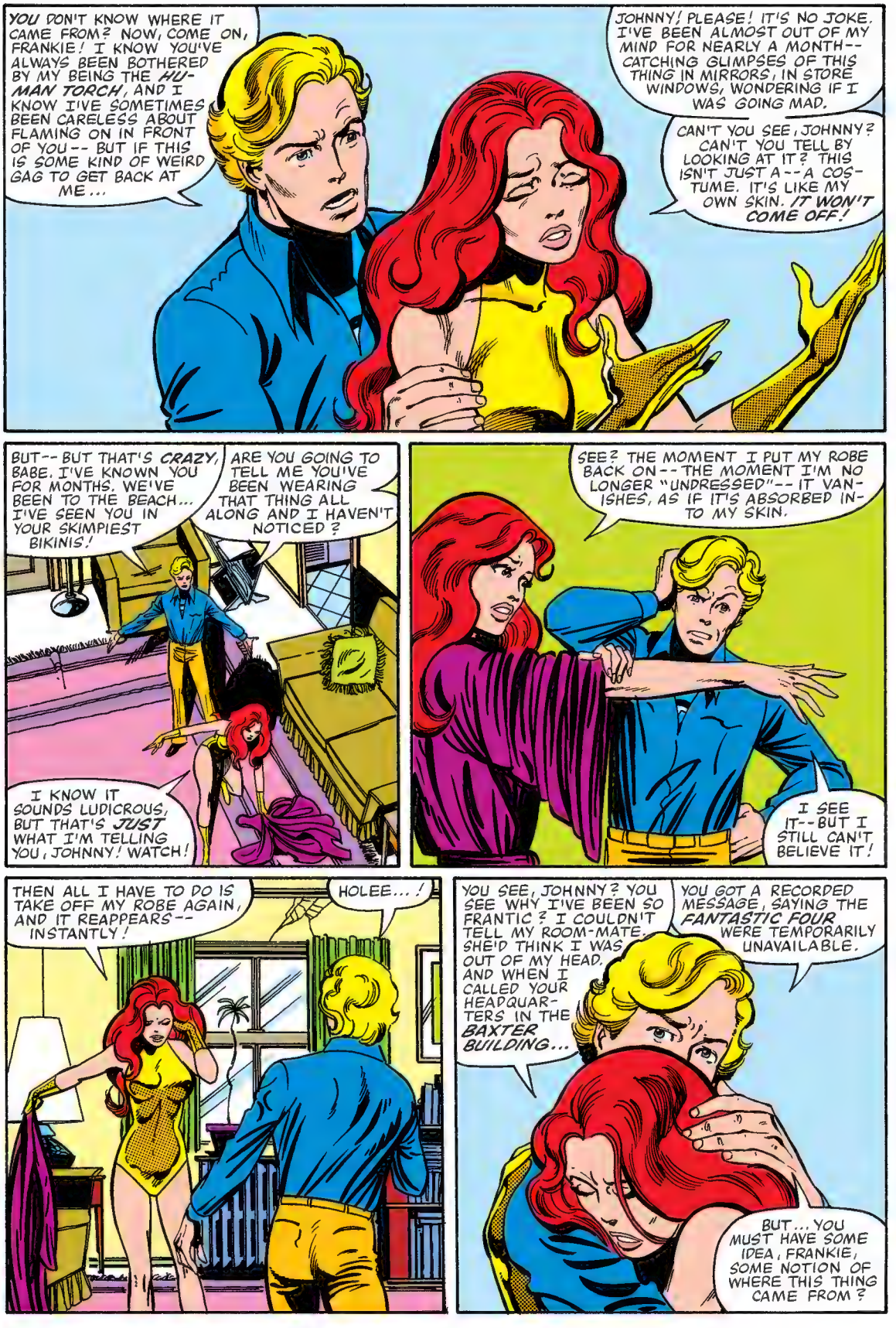
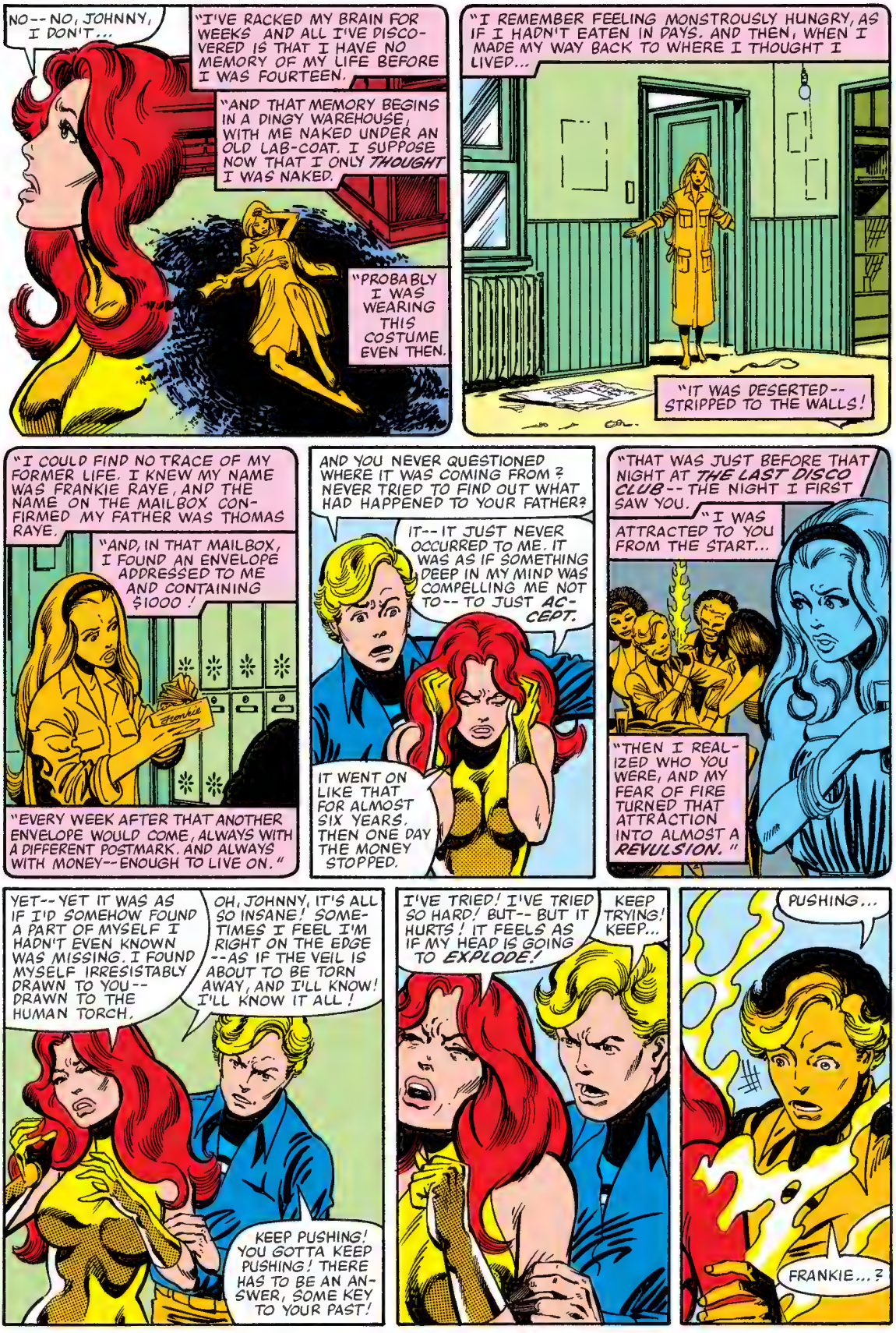
Stan Lee PRESENTS: THE FANTASTIC FOUR!®

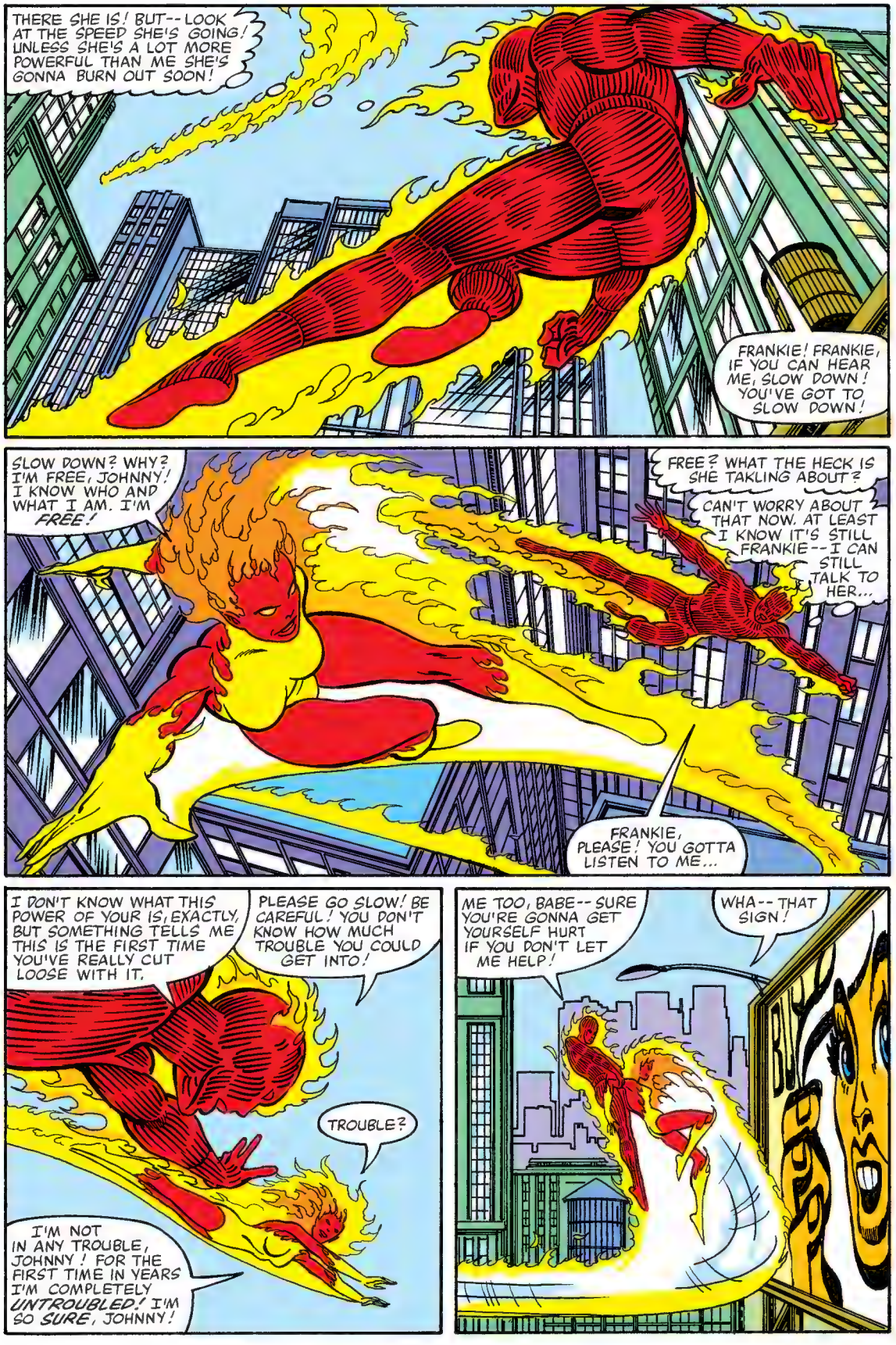
THE LADY IS FOR BURNING!
FIVE MINUTES AGO, JOHNNY STORM ENTERED THE APARTMENT OF HIS GIRLFRIEND FRANKIE RAYE WITH NOTHING MORE ON HIS MIND THAN APOLOGIZING FOR HIS LONG ABSENCE...*
...INSTEAD HE FOUND HIMSELF CONFRONTED WITH A DISCOVERY WHICH IS DESTINED TO CHANGE NOT ONLY HIS LIFE, BUT THOSE OF ALL THE FANTASTIC FOUR AS WELL.
DO YOU SEE IT, JOHNNY? PLEASE TELL ME YOU CAN SEE IT TOO!
I SEE IT BABE, BUT WHAT IS IT? WHAT'S IT FOR?
THAT'S JUST IT, JOHNNY! I DON'T KNOW WHAT IT'S FOR --I DON'T EVEN KNOW WHERE IT CAME FROM!
* THE HUMAN TORCH AND HIS THREE PARTNERS WERE PRISONERS OF DOCTOR DOOM. --SALICRUP.

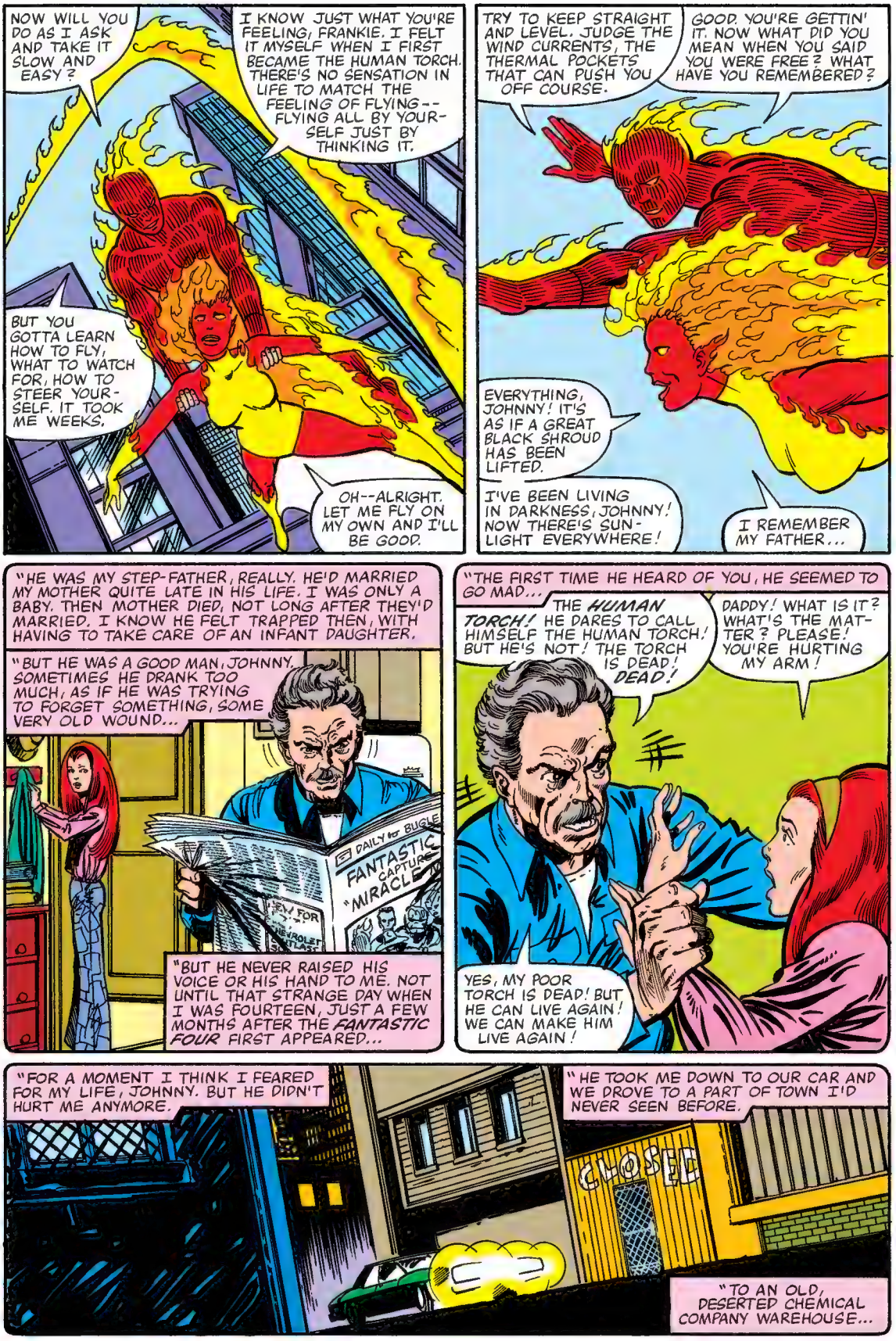
JOHN BYRNE / WORDS AND PICTURES | JIM NOVAK / LETTERING | BOB SHAREN / COLORING | JIM SALICRUP / EDITOR | JIM SHOOTER / EDITOR-IN-CHIEF


YOU DON'T KNOW WHERE IT CAME FROM? NOW, COME ON, FRANKIE! I KNOW YOU'VE ALWAYS BEEN BOTHERED BY MY BEING THE HUMAN TORCH, AND I KNOW I'VE SOMETIMES BEEN CARELESS ABOUT FLAMING ON IN FRONT OF YOU-- BUT IF THIS IS SOME KIND OF WEIRD GAG TO GET BACK AT ME...
JOHNNY! PLEASE! IT'S NO JOKE. I'VE BEEN ALMOST OUT OF MY MIND FOR NEARLY A MONTH-- CATCHING GLIMPSES OF THIS THING IN MIRRORS, IN STORE WINDOWS, WONDERING IF I WAS GOING MAD.
CAN'T YOU SEE, JOHNNY? CAN'T YOU TELL BY LOOKING AT IT? THIS ISN'T JUST A--A COSTUME. IT'S LIKE MY OWN SKIN. IT WON'T COME OFF!
BUT-- BUT THAT'S CRAZY, BABE. I'VE KNOWN YOU FOR MONTHS. WE'VE BEEN TO THE BEACH... I'VE SEEN YOU IN YOUR SKIMPIEST BIKINIS!
ARE YOU GOING TO TELL ME YOU'VE BEEN WEARING THAT THING ALL ALONG AND I HAVEN'T NOTICED?
I KNOW IT SOUNDS LUDICROUS, BUT THAT'S JUST WHAT I'M TELLING YOU, JOHNNY! WATCH!
SEE? THE MOMENT I PUT MY ROBE BACK ON-- THE MOMENT I'M NO LONGER "UNDRESSED"-- IT VANISHES, AS IF IT'S ABSORBED INTO MY SKIN.
I SEE IT--BUT I STILL CAN'T BELIEVE IT!
THEN ALL I HAVE TO DO IS TAKE OFF MY ROBE AGAIN, AND IT REAPPEARS-- INSTANTLY!
HOLEE... !
YOU SEE, JOHNNY? YOU SEE WHY I'VE BEEN SO FRANTIC? I COULDN'T TELL MY ROOM-MATE. SHE'D THINK I WAS OUT OF MY HEAD. AND WHEN I CALLED YOUR HEADQUARTERS IN THE BAXTER BUILDING...
YOU GOT A RECORDED MESSAGE, SAYING THE FANTASTIC FOUR WERE TEMPORARILY UNAVAILABLE.
BUT... YOU MUST HAVE SOME IDEA, FRANKIE, SOME NOTION OF WHERE THIS THING CAME FROM?

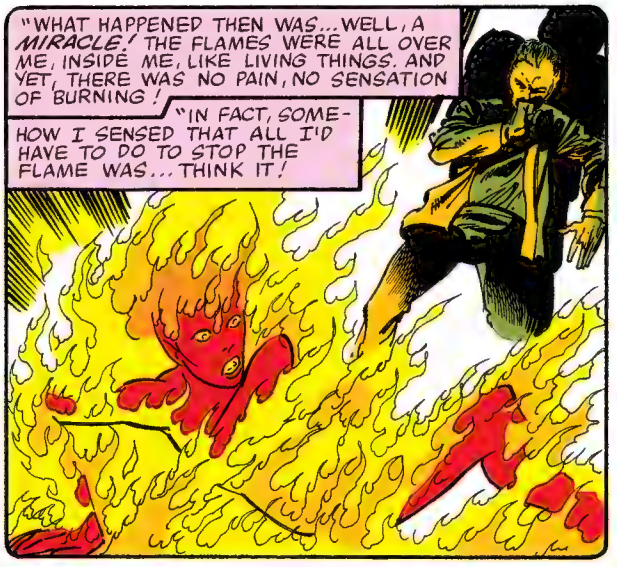

NO--NO, JOHNNY, I DON'T...
"I'VE RACKED MY BRAIN FOR WEEKS AND ALL I'VE DISCOVERED IS THAT I HAVE NO MEMORY OF MY LIFE BEFORE I WAS FOURTEEN.
"AND THAT MEMORY BEGINS IN A DINGY WAREHOUSE, WITH ME NAKED UNDER AN OLD LAB-COAT. I SUPPOSE NOW THAT I ONLY THOUGHT I WAS NAKED.
"PROBABLY I WAS WEARING THIS COSTUME EVEN THEN.
"I REMEMBER FEELING MONSTROUSLY HUNGRY, AS IF I HADN'T EATEN IN DAYS. AND THEN, WHEN I MADE MY WAY BACK TO WHERE I THOUGHT I LIVED...
"IT WAS DESERTED--STRIPPED TO THE WALLS!
"I COULD FIND NO TRACE OF MY FORMER LIFE. I KNEW MY NAME WAS FRANKIE RAYE, AND THE NAME ON THE MAILBOX CONFIRMED MY FATHER WAS THOMAS RAYE.
"AND, IN THAT MAILBOX, I FOUND AN ENVELOPE ADDRESSED TO ME AND CONTAINING $1000!
"EVERY WEEK AFTER THAT ANOTHER ENVELOPE WOULD COME, ALWAYS WITH A DIFFERENT POSTMARK, AND ALWAYS WITH MONEY--ENOUGH TO LIVE ON."
AND YOU NEVER QUESTIONED WHERE IT WAS COMING FROM? NEVER TRIED TO FIND OUT WHAT HAD HAPPENED TO YOUR FATHER?
IT--IT JUST NEVER OCCURRED TO ME. IT WAS AS IF SOMETHING DEEP IN MY MIND WAS COMPELLING ME NOT TO--TO JUST ACCEPT.
IT WENT ON LIKE THAT FOR ALMOST SIX YEARS. THEN ONE DAY THE MONEY STOPPED.
"THAT WAS JUST BEFORE THAT NIGHT AT THE LAST DISCO CLUB--THE NIGHT I FIRST SAW YOU.
"I WAS ATTRACTED TO YOU FROM THE START...
"THEN I REALIZED WHO YOU WERE, AND MY FEAR OF FIRE TURNED THAT ATTRACTION INTO ALMOST A REVULSION."
YET--YET IT WAS AS IF I'D SOMEHOW FOUND A PART OF MYSELF I HADN'T EVEN KNOWN WAS MISSING. I FOUND MYSELF IRRESISTABLY DRAWN TO YOU--DRAWN TO THE HUMAN TORCH.
OH, JOHNNY, IT'S ALL SO INSANE! SOMETIMES I FEEL I'M RIGHT ON THE EDGE--AS IF THE VEIL IS ABOUT TO BE TORN AWAY, AND I'LL KNOW! I'LL KNOW IT ALL!
KEEP PUSHING! YOU GOTTA KEEP PUSHING! THERE HAS TO BE AN ANSWER, SOME KEY TO YOUR PAST!
I'VE TRIED! I'VE TRIED SO HARD! BUT--BUT IT HURTS! IT FEELS AS IF MY HEAD IS GOING TO EXPLODE!
KEEP TRYING! KEEP...
PUSHING...
FRANKIE...?

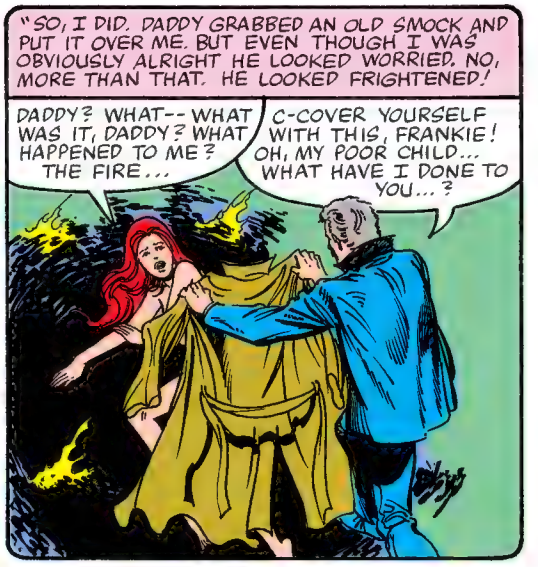
FRANKIE!
I-- REMEMBER!
A SUDDEN BURST AND SWIRL OF BLINDING, BLISTERING FLAME, AND THE GIRL CALLED FRANKIE RAYE IS GONE...
...IN HER PLACE A GOLD AND CRIMSON COMET STREAKS SKYWARD, OBLIVIOUS TO THE MAN-MADE BARRIERS IN HER PATH...
AND FOR A MOMENT THE HUMAN TORCH CAN ONLY STAND DUMB-FOUNDED...
SHE-- SHE FLAMED ON!
BUT THAT'S IMPOSSIBLE! I'M THE ONLY ONE WHO CAN STILL DO THAT!
GOTTA GET AFTER HER!
BUT FIRST, GOTTA DRAW THE FLAMES OF HER FIRE-TRAIL TO ME BEFORE THEY BURN DOWN THE WHOLE BUILDING!
FLAME ON!
DID IT! GOOD THING FRANKIE HAS A TOP-FLOOR APARTMENT. AT LEAST SHE DIDN'T KILL ANY-ONE ON HER WAY OUT!
NOW-- WHERE THE HECK HAS SHE GONE?

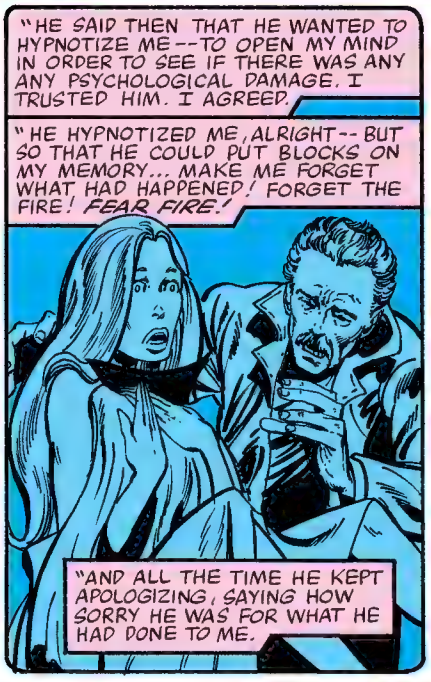

THERE SHE IS! BUT-- LOOK AT THE SPEED SHE'S GOING! UNLESS SHE'S A LOT MORE POWERFUL THAN ME SHE'S GONNA BURN OUT SOON!
FRANKIE! FRANKIE, IF YOU CAN HEAR ME, SLOW DOWN! YOU'VE GOT TO SLOW DOWN!
SLOW DOWN? WHY? I'M FREE, JOHNNY! I KNOW WHO AND WHAT I AM. I'M FREE!
FREE? WHAT THE HECK IS SHE TAKLING ABOUT?
CAN'T WORRY ABOUT THAT NOW. AT LEAST I KNOW IT'S STILL FRANKIE-- I CAN STILL TALK TO HER...
FRANKIE, PLEASE! YOU GOTTA LISTEN TO ME...
I DON'T KNOW WHAT THIS POWER OF YOUR IS, EXACTLY, BUT SOMETHING TELLS ME THIS IS THE FIRST TIME YOU'VE REALLY CUT LOOSE WITH IT.
PLEASE GO SLOW! BE CAREFUL! YOU DON'T KNOW HOW MUCH TROUBLE YOU COULD GET INTO!
TROUBLE?
I'M NOT IN ANY TROUBLE, JOHNNY! FOR THE FIRST TIME IN YEARS I'M COMPLETELY UNTROUBLED! I'M SO SURE, JOHNNY!
ME TOO, BABE-- SURE YOU'RE GONNA GET YOURSELF HURT IF YOU DON'T LET ME HELP!
WHA-- THAT SIGN!
BUY POP


NOW WILL YOU DO AS I ASK AND TAKE IT SLOW AND EASY?
I KNOW JUST WHAT YOU'RE FEELING, FRANKIE. I FELT IT MYSELF WHEN I FIRST BECAME THE HUMAN TORCH. THERE'S NO SENSATION IN LIFE TO MATCH THE FEELING OF FLYING--FLYING ALL BY YOURSELF JUST BY THINKING IT.
BUT YOU GOTTA LEARN HOW TO FLY, WHAT TO WATCH FOR, HOW TO STEER YOURSELF. IT TOOK ME WEEKS.
OH--ALRIGHT. LET ME FLY ON MY OWN AND I'LL BE GOOD.
TRY TO KEEP STRAIGHT AND LEVEL. JUDGE THE WIND CURRENTS, THE THERMAL POCKETS THAT CAN PUSH YOU OFF COURSE.
GOOD. YOU'RE GETTIN' IT. NOW WHAT DID YOU MEAN WHEN YOU SAID YOU WERE FREE? WHAT HAVE YOU REMEMBERED?
EVERYTHING, JOHNNY! IT'S AS IF A GREAT BLACK SHROUD HAS BEEN LIFTED.
I'VE BEEN LIVING IN DARKNESS, JOHNNY! NOW THERE'S SUNLIGHT EVERYWHERE!
I REMEMBER MY FATHER...
"HE WAS MY STEP-FATHER, REALLY. HE'D MARRIED MY MOTHER QUITE LATE IN HIS LIFE. I WAS ONLY A BABY. THEN MOTHER DIED, NOT LONG AFTER THEY'D MARRIED. I KNOW HE FELT TRAPPED THEN, WITH HAVING TO TAKE CARE OF AN INFANT DAUGHTER.
"BUT HE WAS A GOOD MAN, JOHNNY. SOMETIMES HE DRANK TOO MUCH, AS IF HE WAS TRYING TO FORGET SOMETHING, SOME VERY OLD WOUND...
DAILY BUGLE
FANTASTIC CAPTURE "MIRACLE
"BUT HE NEVER RAISED HIS VOICE OR HIS HAND TO ME. NOT UNTIL THAT STRANGE DAY WHEN I WAS FOURTEEN, JUST A FEW MONTHS AFTER THE FANTASTIC FOUR FIRST APPEARED...
"THE FIRST TIME HE HEARD OF YOU, HE SEEMED TO GO MAD...
THE HUMAN TORCH! HE DARES TO CALL HIMSELF THE HUMAN TORCH! BUT HE'S NOT! THE TORCH IS DEAD! DEAD!
DADDY! WHAT IS IT? WHAT'S THE MATTER? PLEASE! YOU'RE HURTING MY ARM!
YES, MY POOR TORCH IS DEAD! BUT HE CAN LIVE AGAIN! WE CAN MAKE HIM LIVE AGAIN!
"FOR A MOMENT I THINK I FEARED FOR MY LIFE, JOHNNY. BUT HE DIDN'T HURT ME ANYMORE.
"HE TOOK ME DOWN TO OUR CAR AND WE DROVE TO A PART OF TOWN I'D NEVER SEEN BEFORE.
CLOSED
"TO AN OLD, DESERTED CHEMICAL COMPANY WAREHOUSE...

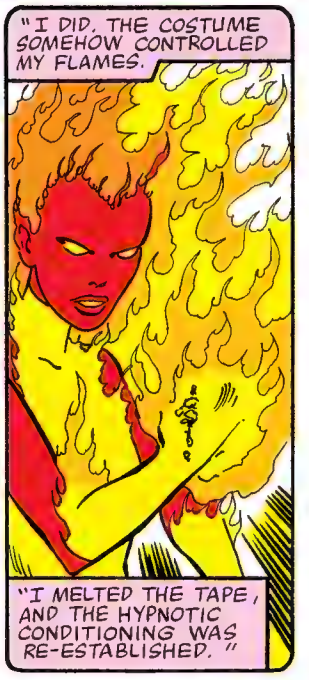
"TO MY AMAZEMENT MY STEP-FATHER PRODUCED A KEY TO ONE OF THE RUSTED PADLOCKS, AND WE WENT IN.
IT'S STILL HERE! ALL MY EQUIPMENT-- MY CHEMICALS! THE GOVERNMENT IMPOUNDED THEM-- SAID THE TORCH WAS TOO DANGEROUS-- SAID THEY COULDN'T PERMIT ME TO CONTINUE MY EXPERIMENTS!
"YOU CAN'T IMAGINE HOW TOTALLY CONFUSED I WAS. AS LONG AS I HAD KNOWN HIM MY STEP-FATHER HAD BEEN A SIMPLE REPAIR-MAN.
"HIS TALK OF GOVERNMENT INTERVENTION, OF EXPERIMENTS... IT ALL SOUNDED INSANE.
YES, EVERYTHING IS HERE. THEY FORGOT ABOUT IT, YOU SEE, LOST IN ALL THE PAPERWORK OF WORLD WAR TWO. EVEN MY PRECIOUS MOLDS, LEFT TO RUST.
FOOLS! THEY COULD HAVE HAD AN ARMY OF TORCHES TO BATTLE THE NAZIS.
"AT THAT POINT I DON'T KNOW IF I WAS HUMORING HIM, OR IF HIS FERVOR WAS STARTING TO INFECT ME, TOO.
"WHATEVER IT WAS, WHEN HE STARTED CARRYING BOXES AND CANS OUT TO THE CAR I WAS EAGER TO HELP.
BE CAREFUL, FRANKIE!
I'M OKAY, DADDY. REALLY! I'M A LOT STRONGER THAN I LOOK!
"YES, I WAS STRONG ENOUGH...
"BUT THE FLOOR WASN'T!
"SUDDENLY I WAS FALLING, AND AS I TOPPLED...
"I FELT THE OLD CHEMICALS SLOSH INSIDE THE DRUM AND GROW HOT!
"THE NEXT INSTANT, I WAS ENGULFED IN FLAME!
FRANKIE!

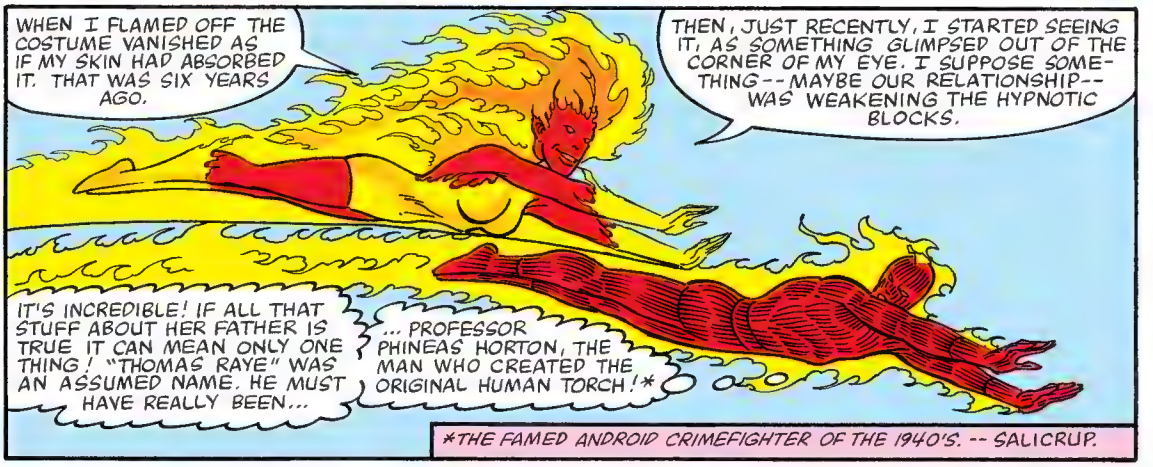

"WHAT HAPPENED THEN WAS...WELL, A MIRACLE! THE FLAMES WERE ALL OVER ME, INSIDE ME, LIKE LIVING THINGS. AND YET, THERE WAS NO PAIN, NO SENSATION OF BURNING!
"IN FACT, SOMEHOW I SENSED THAT ALL I'D HAVE TO DO TO STOP THE FLAME WAS... THINK IT!

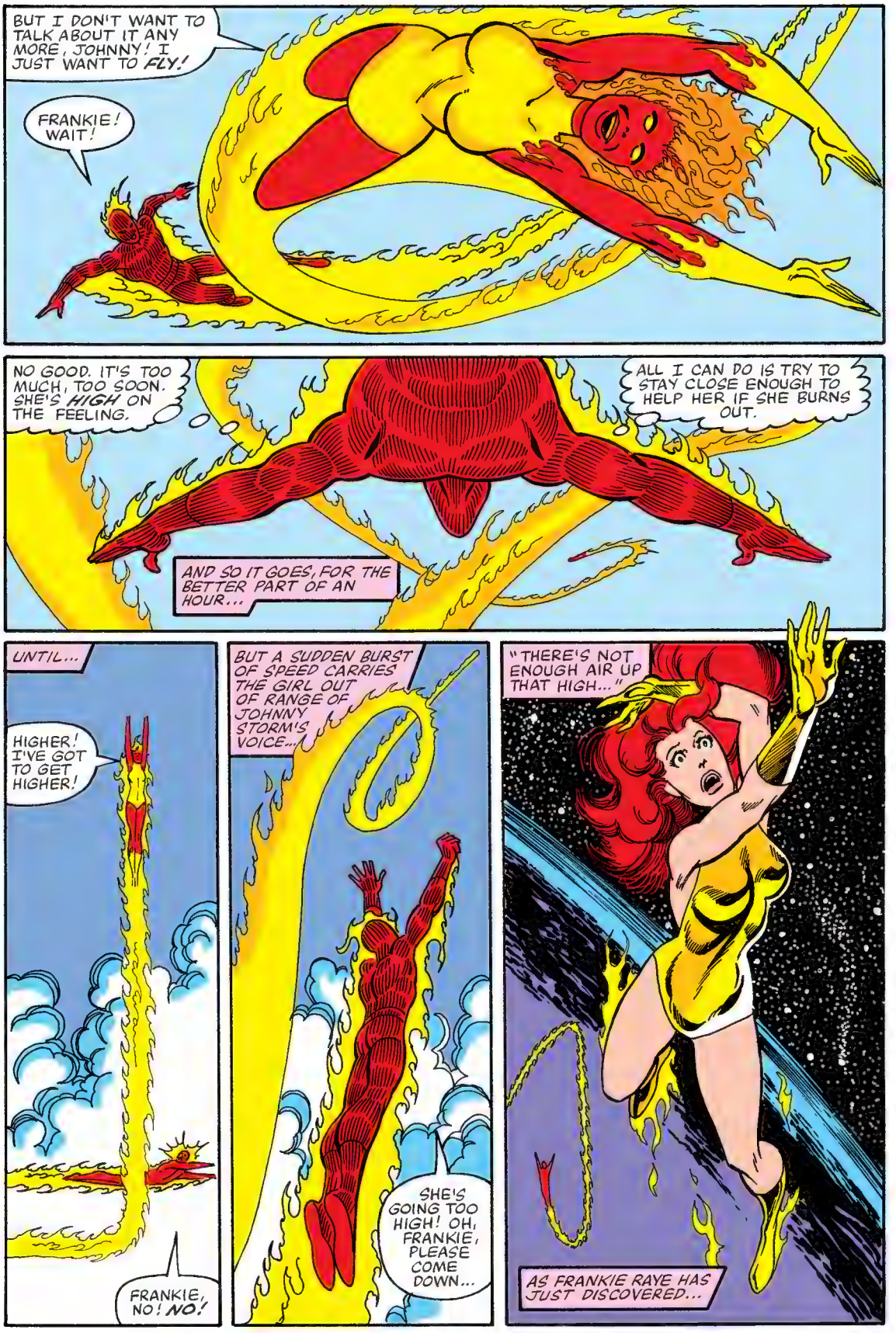

"SO, I DID. DADDY GRABBED AN OLD SMOCK AND PUT IT OVER ME. BUT EVEN THOUGH I WAS OBVIOUSLY ALRIGHT HE LOOKED WORRIED. NO, MORE THAN THAT. HE LOOKED FRIGHTENED!
DADDY? WHAT-- WHAT WAS IT, DADDY? WHAT HAPPENED TO ME? THE FIRE...
C-COVER YOURSELF WITH THIS, FRANKIE! OH, MY POOR CHILD... WHAT HAVE I DONE TO YOU...?

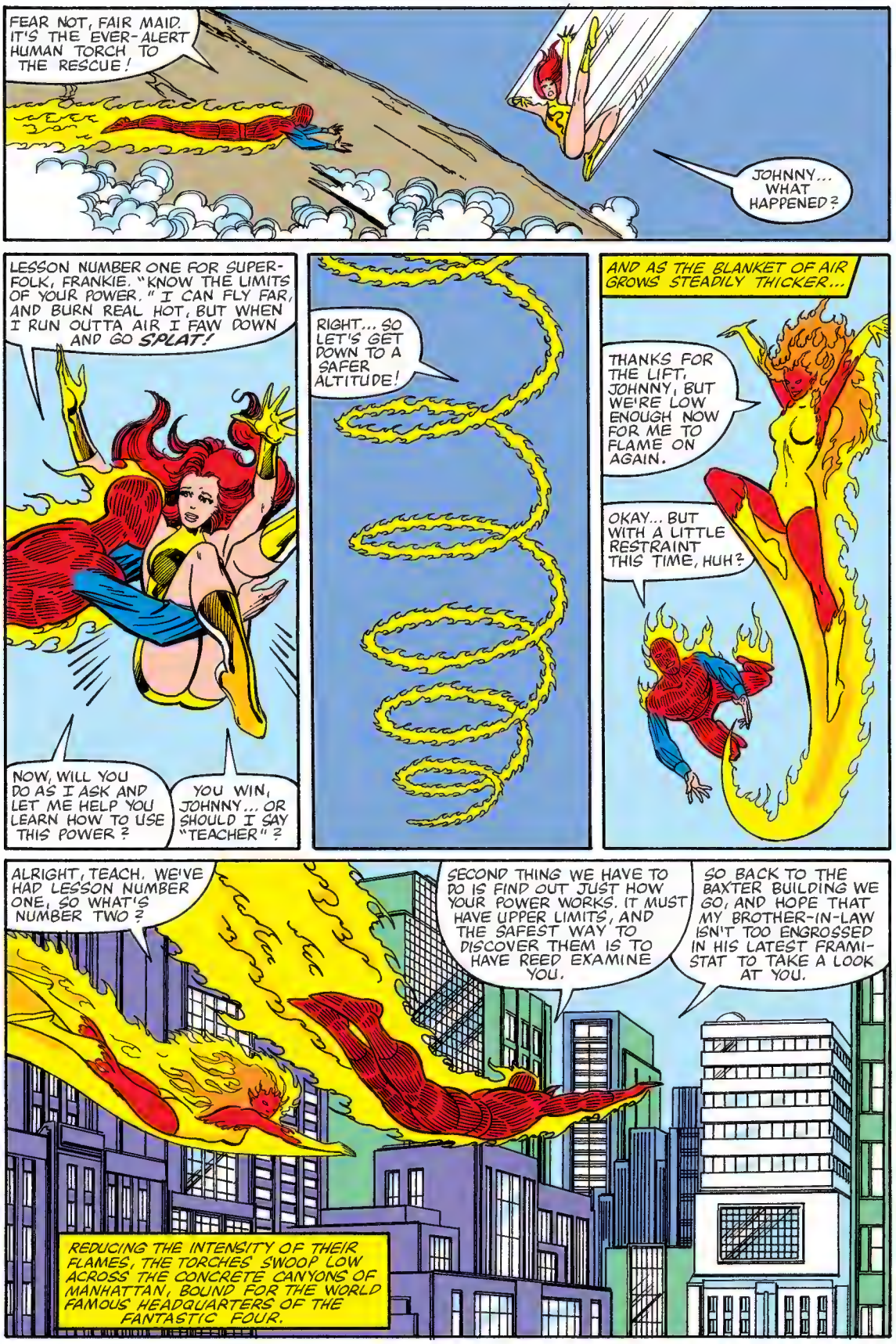

"HE SAID THEN THAT HE WANTED TO HYPNOTIZE ME--TO OPEN MY MIND IN ORDER TO SEE IF THERE WAS ANY ANY PSYCHOLOGICAL DAMAGE. I TRUSTED HIM. I AGREED.
"HE HYPNOTIZED ME, ALRIGHT-- BUT SO THAT HE COULD PUT BLOCKS ON MY MEMORY... MAKE ME FORGET WHAT HAD HAPPENED! FORGET THE FIRE! FEAR FIRE!
"AND ALL THE TIME HE KEPT APOLOGIZING, SAYING HOW SORRY HE WAS FOR WHAT HE HAD DONE TO ME.

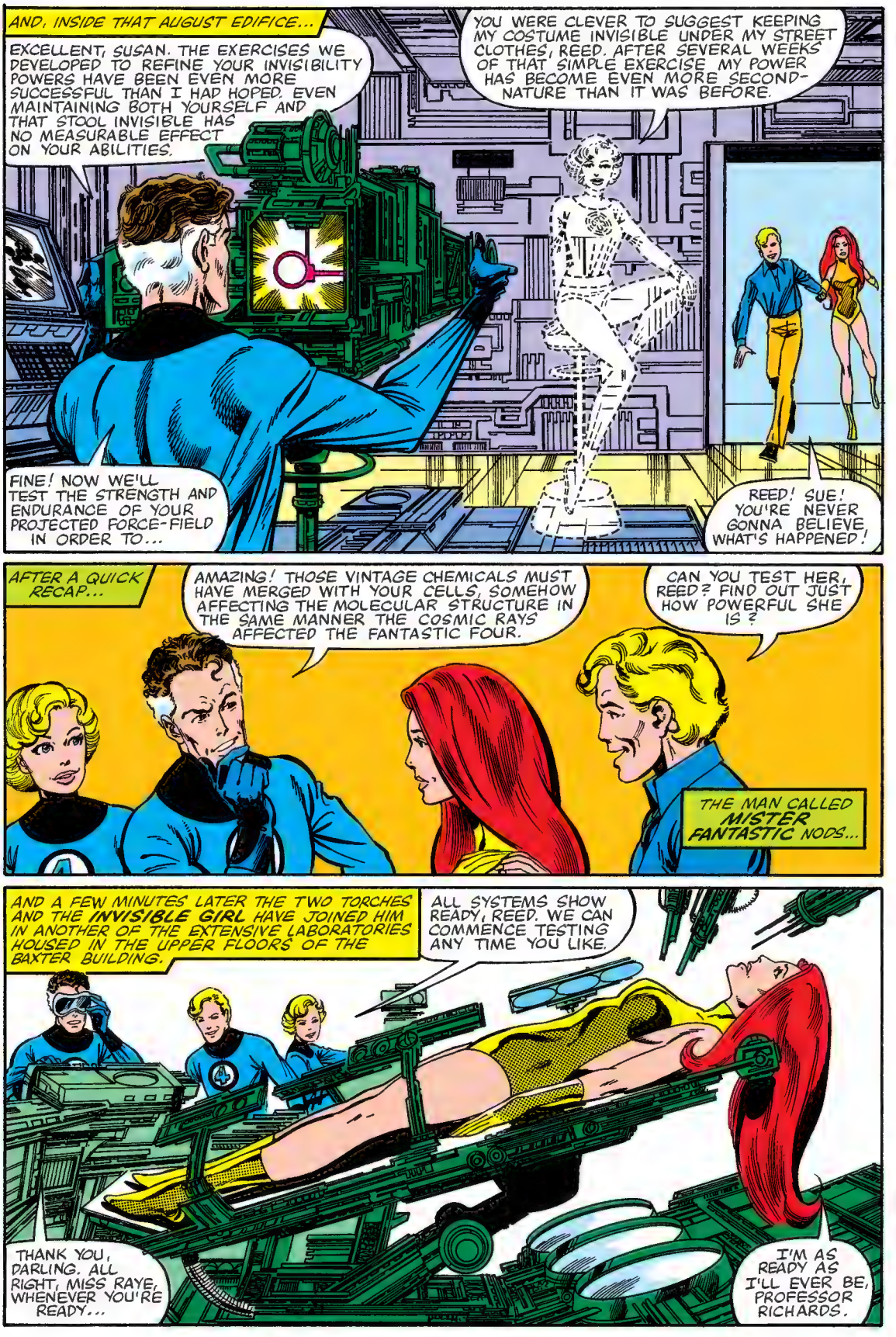
"I JUST DIDN'T UNDERSTAND. THEN, ALMOST A YEAR LATER, A PACKAGE CAME FOR ME. INSIDE WAS THIS COSTUME AND A CASSETTE RECORDER.
"THE TAPED MESSAGE WAS FROM MY FATHER. USING A CODE-WORD HE'D PLANTED IN MY MIND...
"... HE TOLD ME TO PUT ON THE COSTUME AND DESTROY THE TAPE.

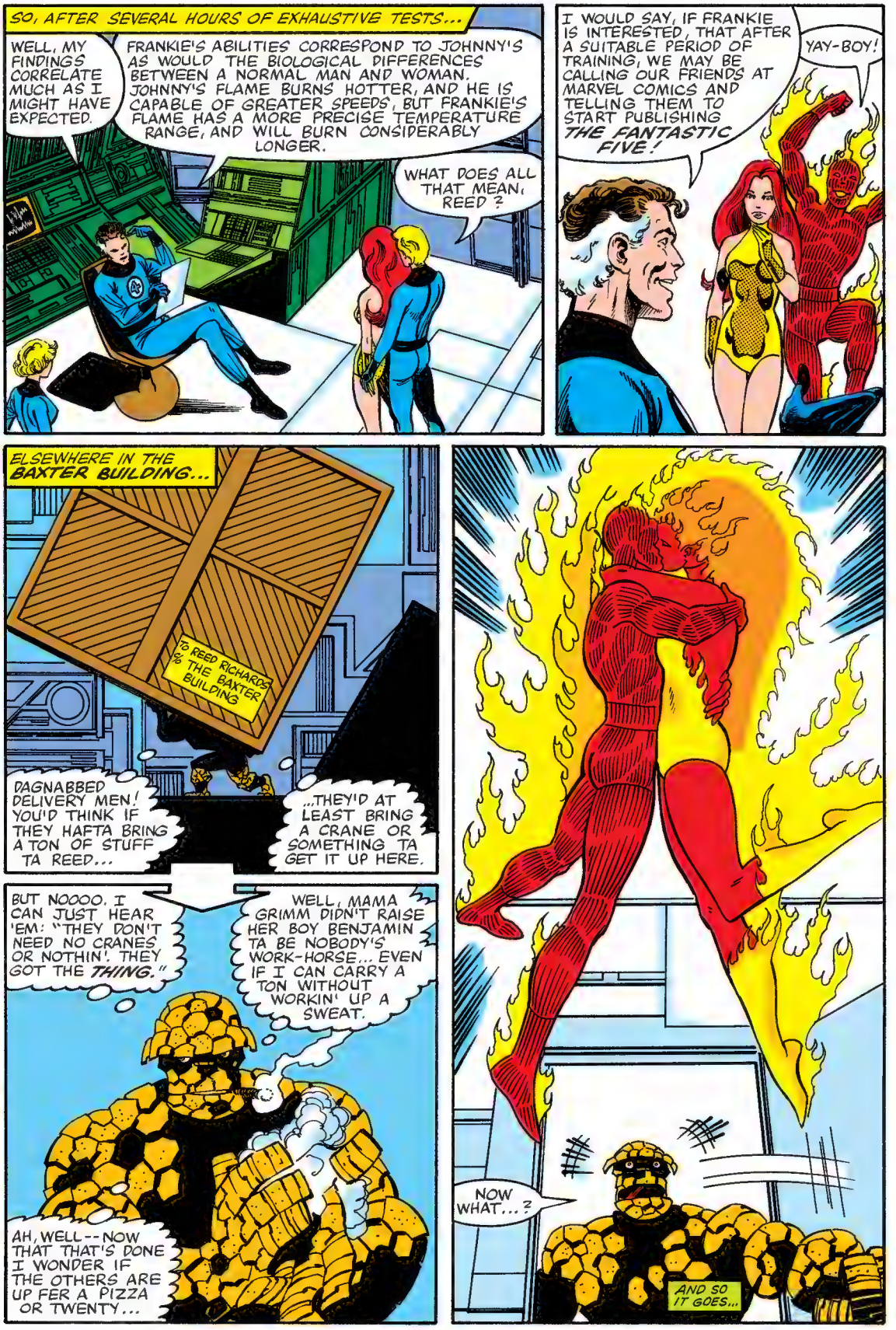

"I DID. THE COSTUME SOMEHOW CONTROLLED MY FLAMES.
"I MELTED THE TAPE, AND THE HYPNOTIC CONDITIONING WAS RE-ESTABLISHED."

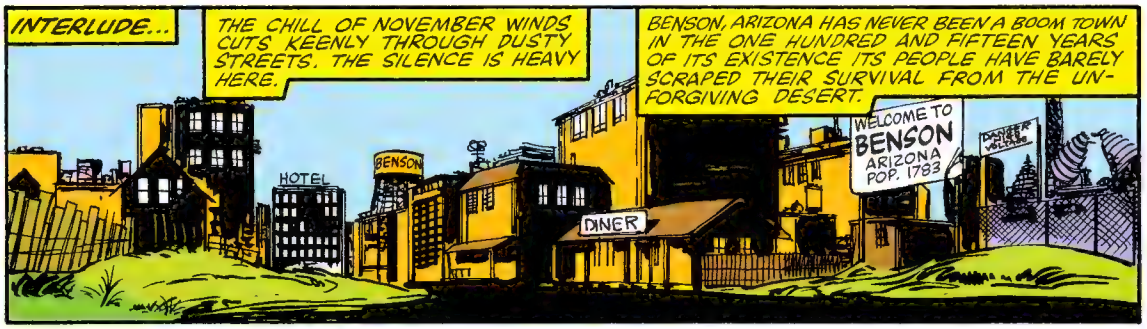

WHEN I FLAMED OFF THE COSTUME VANISHED AS IF MY SKIN HAD ABSORBED IT. THAT WAS SIX YEARS AGO.
THEN, JUST RECENTLY, I STARTED SEEING IT, AS SOMETHING GLIMPSED OUT OF THE CORNER OF MY EYE. I SUPPOSE SOMETHING--MAYBE OUR RELATIONSHIP--WAS WEAKENING THE HYPNOTIC BLOCKS.
IT'S INCREDIBLE! IF ALL THAT STUFF ABOUT HER FATHER IS TRUE IT CAN MEAN ONLY ONE THING! "THOMAS RAYE" WAS AN ASSUMED NAME. HE MUST HAVE REALLY BEEN...
... PROFESSOR PHINEAS HORTON, THE MAN WHO CREATED THE ORIGINAL HUMAN TORCH!*
*THE FAMED ANDROID CRIMEFIGHTER OF THE 1940'S. -- SALICRUP.

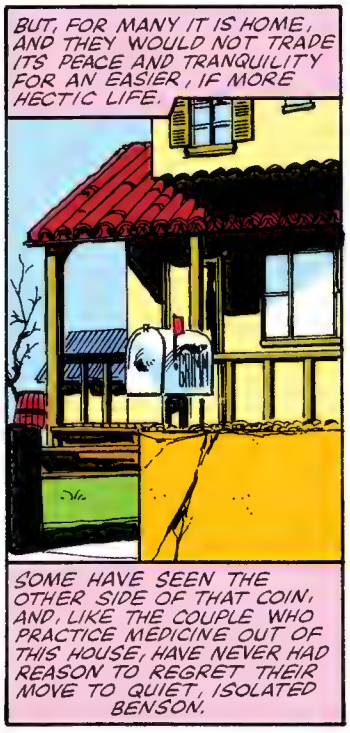

BUT I DON'T WANT TO TALK ABOUT IT ANY MORE, JOHNNY! I JUST WANT TO FLY!
FRANKIE! WAIT!
NO GOOD. IT'S TOO MUCH, TOO SOON. SHE'S HIGH ON THE FEELING.
ALL I CAN DO IS TRY TO STAY CLOSE ENOUGH TO HELP HER IF SHE BURNS OUT.
AND SO IT GOES, FOR THE BETTER PART OF AN HOUR...
UNTIL...
HIGHER! I'VE GOT TO GET HIGHER!
FRANKIE, NO! NO!
BUT A SUDDEN BURST OF SPEED CARRIES THE GIRL OUT OF RANGE OF JOHNNY STORM'S VOICE...
SHE'S GOING TOO HIGH! OH, FRANKIE, PLEASE COME DOWN...
"THERE'S NOT ENOUGH AIR UP THAT HIGH..."
AS FRANKIE RAYE HAS JUST DISCOVERED...

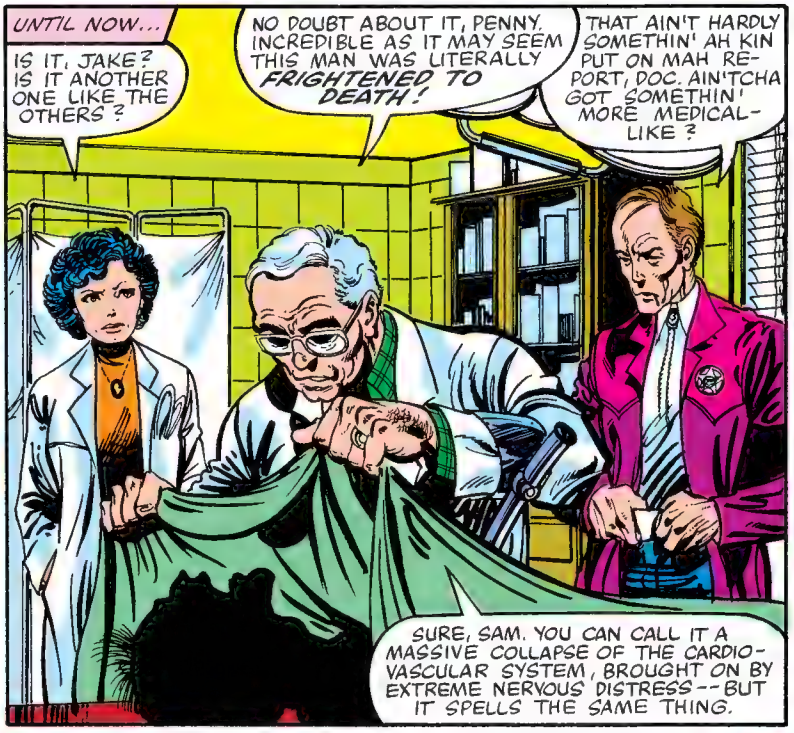

FEAR NOT, FAIR MAID. IT'S THE EVER-ALERT HUMAN TORCH TO THE RESCUE!
JOHNNY... WHAT HAPPENED?
LESSON NUMBER ONE FOR SUPER-FOLK, FRANKIE. "KNOW THE LIMITS OF YOUR POWER." I CAN FLY FAR, AND BURN REAL HOT, BUT WHEN I RUN OUTTA AIR I FAW DOWN AND GO SPLAT!
NOW, WILL YOU DO AS I ASK AND LET ME HELP YOU LEARN HOW TO USE THIS POWER?
YOU WIN, JOHNNY... OR SHOULD I SAY "TEACHER"?
RIGHT... SO LET'S GET DOWN TO A SAFER ALTITUDE!
AND AS THE BLANKET OF AIR GROWS STEADILY THICKER...
THANKS FOR THE LIFT, JOHNNY, BUT WE'RE LOW ENOUGH NOW FOR ME TO FLAME ON AGAIN.
OKAY... BUT WITH A LITTLE RESTRAINT THIS TIME, HUH?
ALRIGHT, TEACH. WE'VE HAD LESSON NUMBER ONE, SO WHAT'S NUMBER TWO?
SECOND THING WE HAVE TO DO IS FIND OUT JUST HOW YOUR POWER WORKS. IT MUST HAVE UPPER LIMITS, AND THE SAFEST WAY TO DISCOVER THEM IS TO HAVE REED EXAMINE YOU.
SO BACK TO THE BAXTER BUILDING WE GO, AND HOPE THAT MY BROTHER-IN-LAW ISN'T TOO ENGROSSED IN HIS LATEST FRAMI-STAT TO TAKE A LOOK AT YOU.
REDUCING THE INTENSITY OF THEIR FLAMES, THE TORCHES SWOOP LOW ACROSS THE CONCRETE CANYONS OF MANHATTAN, BOUND FOR THE WORLD FAMOUS HEADQUARTERS OF THE FANTASTIC FOUR.

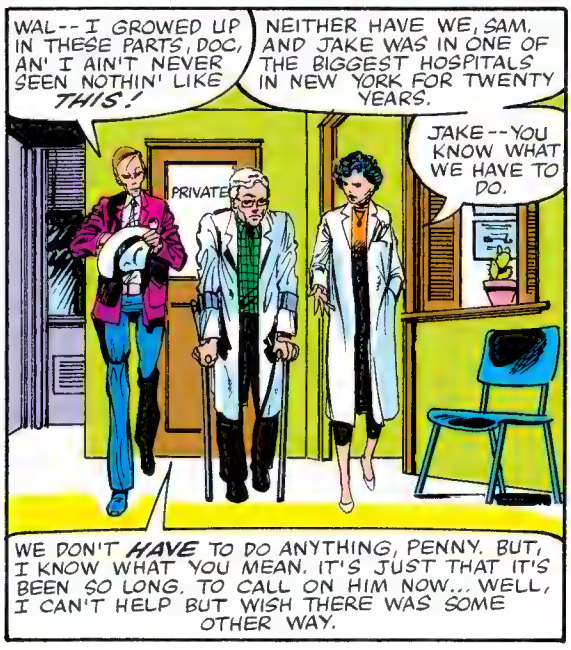

AND, INSIDE THAT AUGUST EDIFICE...
EXCELLENT, SUSAN. THE EXERCISES WE DEVELOPED TO REFINE YOUR INVISIBILITY POWERS HAVE BEEN EVEN MORE SUCCESSFUL THAN I HAD HOPED. EVEN MAINTAINING BOTH YOURSELF AND THAT STOOL INVISIBLE HAS NO MEASURABLE EFFECT ON YOUR ABILITIES.
YOU WERE CLEVER TO SUGGEST KEEPING MY COSTUME INVISIBLE UNDER MY STREET CLOTHES, REED. AFTER SEVERAL WEEKS OF THAT SIMPLE EXERCISE MY POWER HAS BECOME EVEN MORE SECOND-NATURE THAN IT WAS BEFORE.
FINE! NOW WE'LL TEST THE STRENGTH AND ENDURANCE OF YOUR PROJECTED FORCE-FIELD IN ORDER TO...
REED! SUE! YOU'RE NEVER GONNA BELIEVE WHAT'S HAPPENED!
AFTER A QUICK RECAP...
AMAZING! THOSE VINTAGE CHEMICALS MUST HAVE MERGED WITH YOUR CELLS, SOMEHOW AFFECTING THE MOLECULAR STRUCTURE IN THE SAME MANNER THE COSMIC RAYS AFFECTED THE FANTASTIC FOUR.
CAN YOU TEST HER, REED? FIND OUT JUST HOW POWERFUL SHE IS?
THE MAN CALLED MISTER FANTASTIC NODS...
AND A FEW MINUTES LATER THE TWO TORCHES AND THE INVISIBLE GIRL HAVE JOINED HIM IN ANOTHER OF THE EXTENSIVE LABORATORIES HOUSED IN THE UPPER FLOORS OF THE BAXTER BUILDING.
ALL SYSTEMS SHOW READY, REED. WE CAN COMMENCE TESTING ANY TIME YOU LIKE.
THANK YOU, DARLING. ALL RIGHT, MISS RAYE, WHENEVER YOU'RE READY...
I'M AS READY AS I'LL EVER BE, PROFESSOR RICHARDS.


SO, AFTER SEVERAL HOURS OF EXHAUSTIVE TESTS...
WELL, MY FINDINGS CORRELATE MUCH AS I MIGHT HAVE EXPECTED.
FRANKIE'S ABILITIES CORRESPOND TO JOHNNY'S AS WOULD THE BIOLOGICAL DIFFERENCES BETWEEN A NORMAL MAN AND WOMAN. JOHNNY'S FLAME BURNS HOTTER, AND HE IS CAPABLE OF GREATER SPEEDS, BUT FRANKIE'S FLAME HAS A MORE PRECISE TEMPERATURE RANGE, AND WILL BURN CONSIDERABLY LONGER.
WHAT DOES ALL THAT MEAN, REED?
I WOULD SAY, IF FRANKIE IS INTERESTED, THAT AFTER A SUITABLE PERIOD OF TRAINING, WE MAY BE CALLING OUR FRIENDS AT MARVEL COMICS AND TELLING THEM TO START PUBLISHING THE FANTASTIC FIVE!
YAY-BOY!
ELSEWHERE IN THE BAXTER BUILDING...
TO REED RICHARDS & THE BAXTER BUILDING
DAGNABBED DELIVERY MEN! YOU'D THINK IF THEY HAFTA BRING A TON OF STUFF TA REED...
...THEY'D AT LEAST BRING A CRANE OR SOMETHING TA GET IT UP HERE.
BUT NOOOO. I CAN JUST HEAR 'EM: "THEY DON'T NEED NO CRANES OR NOTHIN'. THEY GOT THE THING."
WELL, MAMA GRIMM DIDN'T RAISE HER BOY BENJAMIN TA BE NOBODY'S WORK-HORSE... EVEN IF I CAN CARRY A TON WITHOUT WORKIN' UP A SWEAT.
AH, WELL--NOW THAT THAT'S DONE I WONDER IF THE OTHERS ARE UP FER A PIZZA OR TWENTY...
NOW WHAT...?
AND SO IT GOES...


INTERLUDE...
THE CHILL OF NOVEMBER WINDS CUTS KEENLY THROUGH DUSTY STREETS. THE SILENCE IS HEAVY HERE.
BENSON, ARIZONA HAS NEVER BEEN A BOOM TOWN IN THE ONE HUNDRED AND FIFTEEN YEARS OF ITS EXISTENCE ITS PEOPLE HAVE BARELY SCRAPED THEIR SURVIVAL FROM THE UNFORGIVING DESERT.
HOTEL
BENSON
DINER
WELCOME TO BENSON ARIZONA POP. 1783
DANGER KEEP OUT MINE SHAFTS


BUT, FOR MANY IT IS HOME, AND THEY WOULD NOT TRADE ITS PEACE AND TRANQUILITY FOR AN EASIER, IF MORE HECTIC LIFE.
SOME HAVE SEEN THE OTHER SIDE OF THAT COIN, AND, LIKE THE COUPLE WHO PRACTICE MEDICINE OUT OF THIS HOUSE, HAVE NEVER HAD REASON TO REGRET THEIR MOVE TO QUIET, ISOLATED BENSON.


UNTIL NOW...
IS IT, JAKE? IS IT ANOTHER ONE LIKE THE OTHERS?
NO DOUBT ABOUT IT, PENNY. INCREDIBLE AS IT MAY SEEM THIS MAN WAS LITERALLY FRIGHTENED TO DEATH!
THAT AIN'T HARDLY SOMETHIN' AH KIN PUT ON MAH REPORT, DOC. AIN'TCHA GOT SOMETHIN' MORE MEDICAL-LIKE?
SURE, SAM. YOU CAN CALL IT A MASSIVE COLLAPSE OF THE CARDIOVASCULAR SYSTEM, BROUGHT ON BY EXTREME NERVOUS DISTRESS--BUT IT SPELLS THE SAME THING.

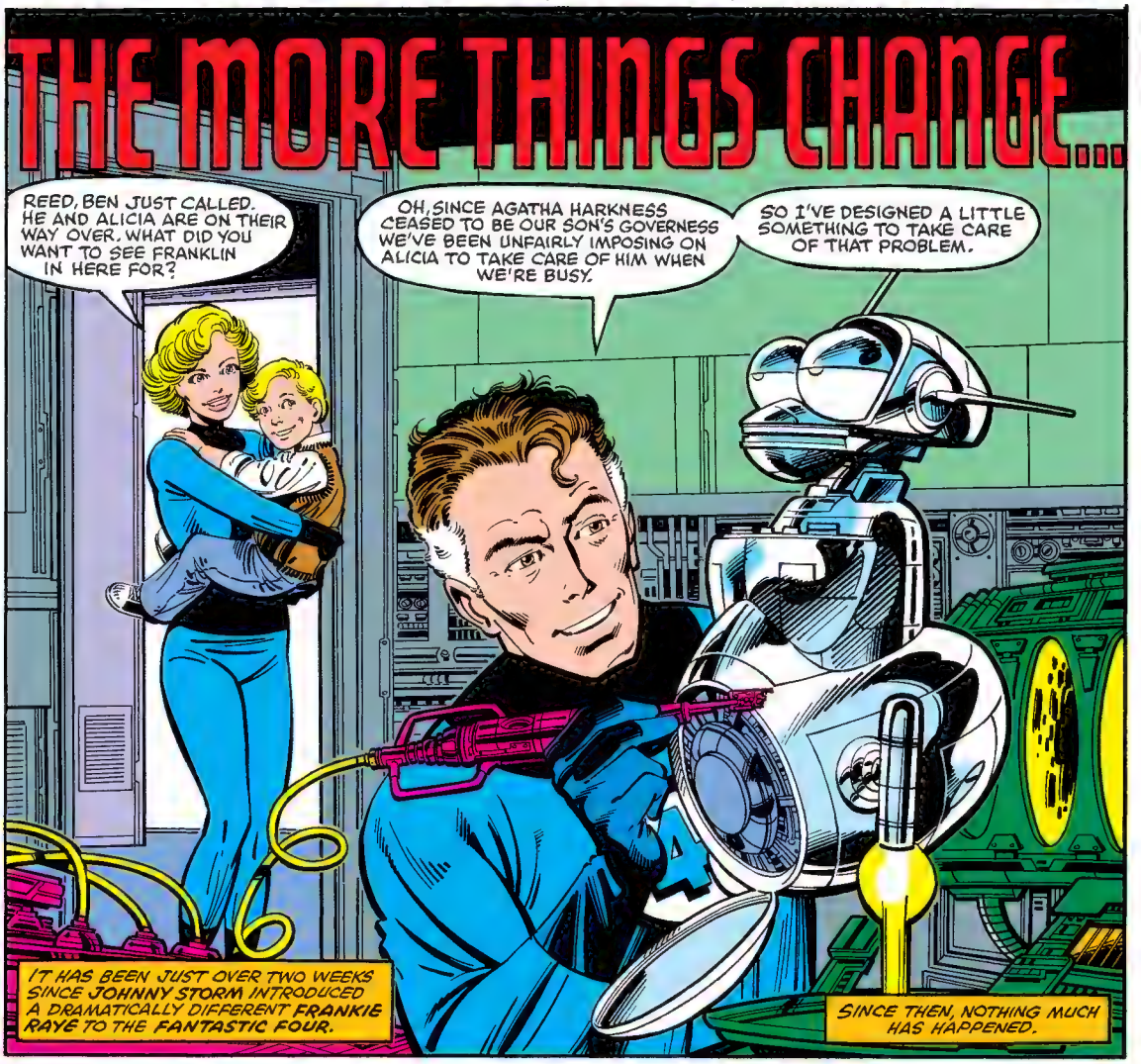

WAL--I GROWED UP IN THESE PARTS, DOC, AN' I AIN'T NEVER SEEN NOTHIN' LIKE THIS!
NEITHER HAVE WE, SAM, AND JAKE WAS IN ONE OF THE BIGGEST HOSPITALS IN NEW YORK FOR TWENTY YEARS.
JAKE--YOU KNOW WHAT WE HAVE TO DO.
PRIVATE
WE DON'T HAVE TO DO ANYTHING, PENNY. BUT, I KNOW WHAT YOU MEAN. IT'S JUST THAT IT'S BEEN SO LONG. TO CALL ON HIM NOW... WELL, I CAN'T HELP BUT WISH THERE WAS SOME OTHER WAY.

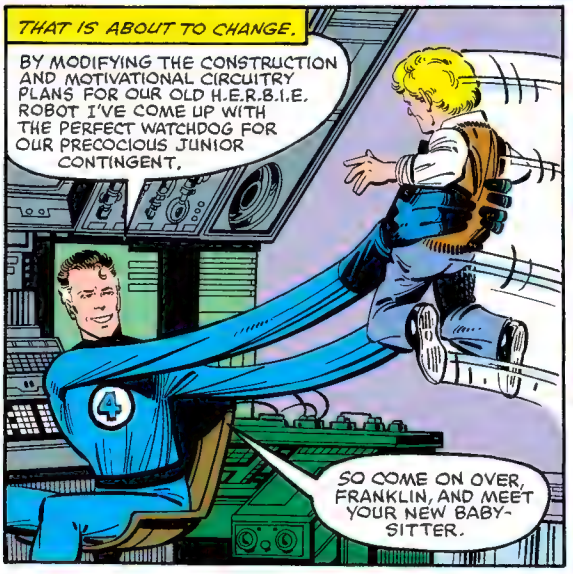
JAKE, YOU KNOW I'VE ALWAYS TRUSTED YOUR JUDGEMENT IMPLICITLY. IN THE YEARS I WAS YOUR STUDENT, IN THE YEARS WE'VE BEEN MARRIED I'VE NEVER DEBATED YOUR DECISIONS.
BUT THIS IS WAY OUT OF OUR LEAGUE, JAKE. THIS IS WAY OUT OF ANYBODY'S LEAGUE. AT LEAST, ANYBODY WITHOUT SPECIAL ABILITIES.
THE ONLY ONES WHO CAN HELP US NOW ARE THE FANTASTIC FOUR!

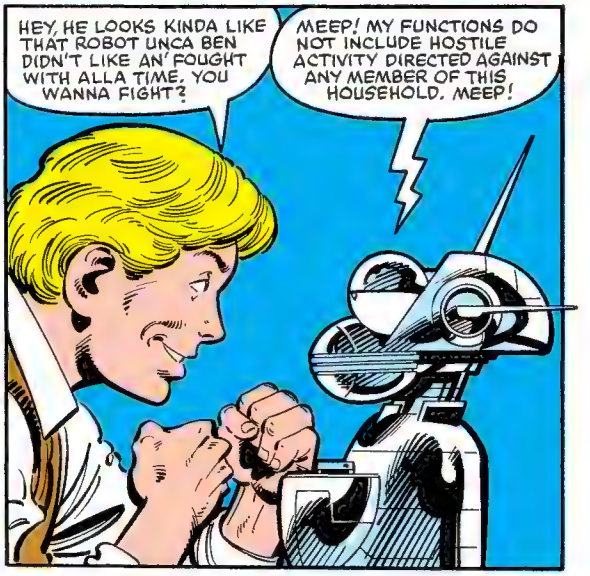
A MARVEL MASTERWORK PIN-UP
Love and Kisses to All our fans!
Susan Richards
JAMES CLAVELL
GUN
X-15
WORLD ENGINEERS
OGDEN NASH
REED RICHARDS
LORD OF THE FLIES
VAN
THE MAGUS JOHN FOWLES
ROTSLER'S ANATOMY
TOM WOLFE
THE RIGHT STUFF
O JERUSALEM
EXPERIMENTS IN POPULAR CULTURE
DANGEROUS VISIONS
SON OF ORIGINS OF MARVEL
BRING ON THE BAD GUYS
Dr. Compulsory Stanislaus Norman
POGO
ARTHUR REX
CAGNEY BY CAGNEY
SO YOU'RE GOING TO HAVE A BABY!
JOHN BYRNE

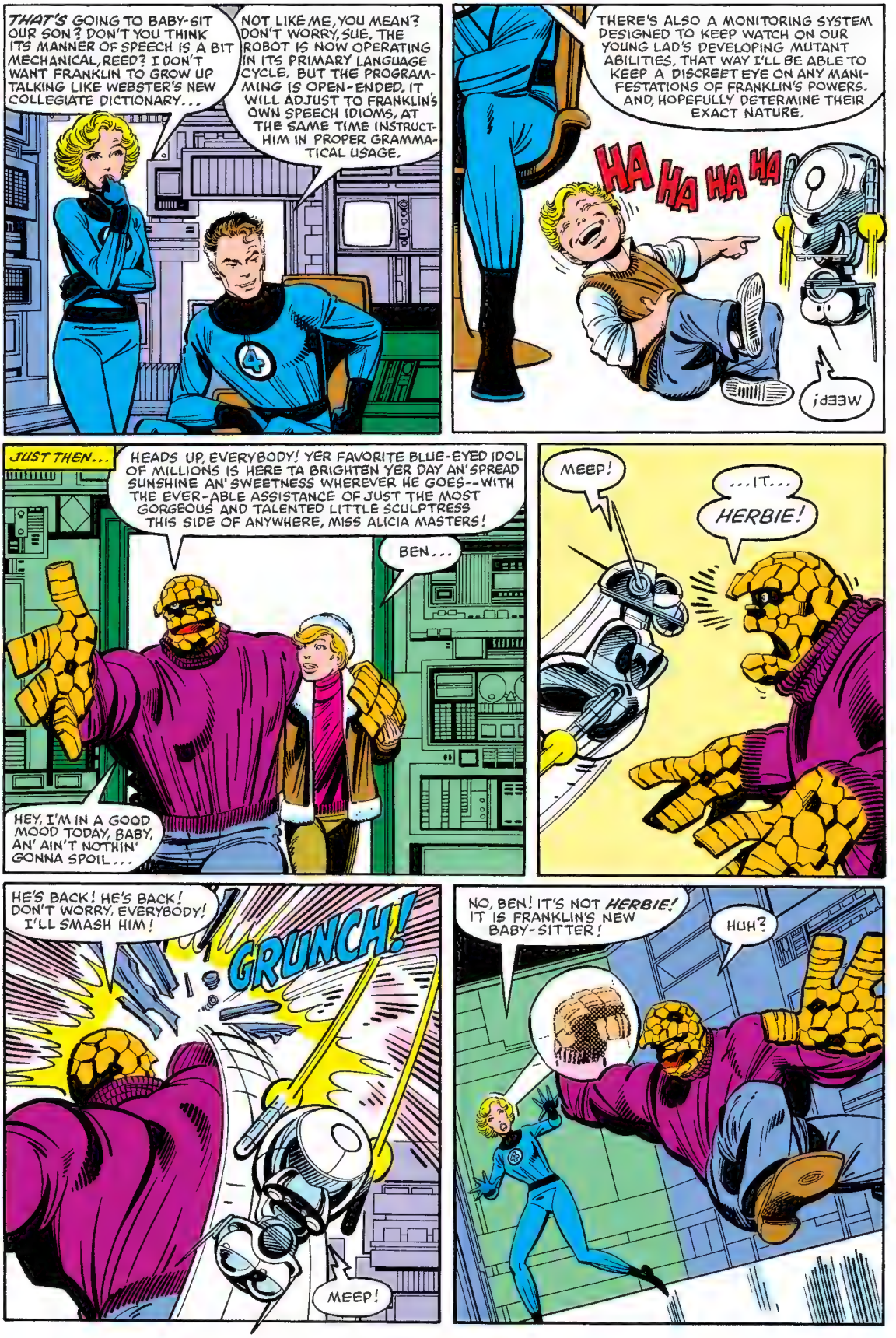
JOHN BYRNE / STORY and PENCILS | TERRY AUSTIN / GUEST INKER | JOE ROSEN / LETTERER | BOB SHAREN / COLORIST | JIM SALICRUP / EDITOR | JIM SHOOTER / EDITOR-IN-CHIEF

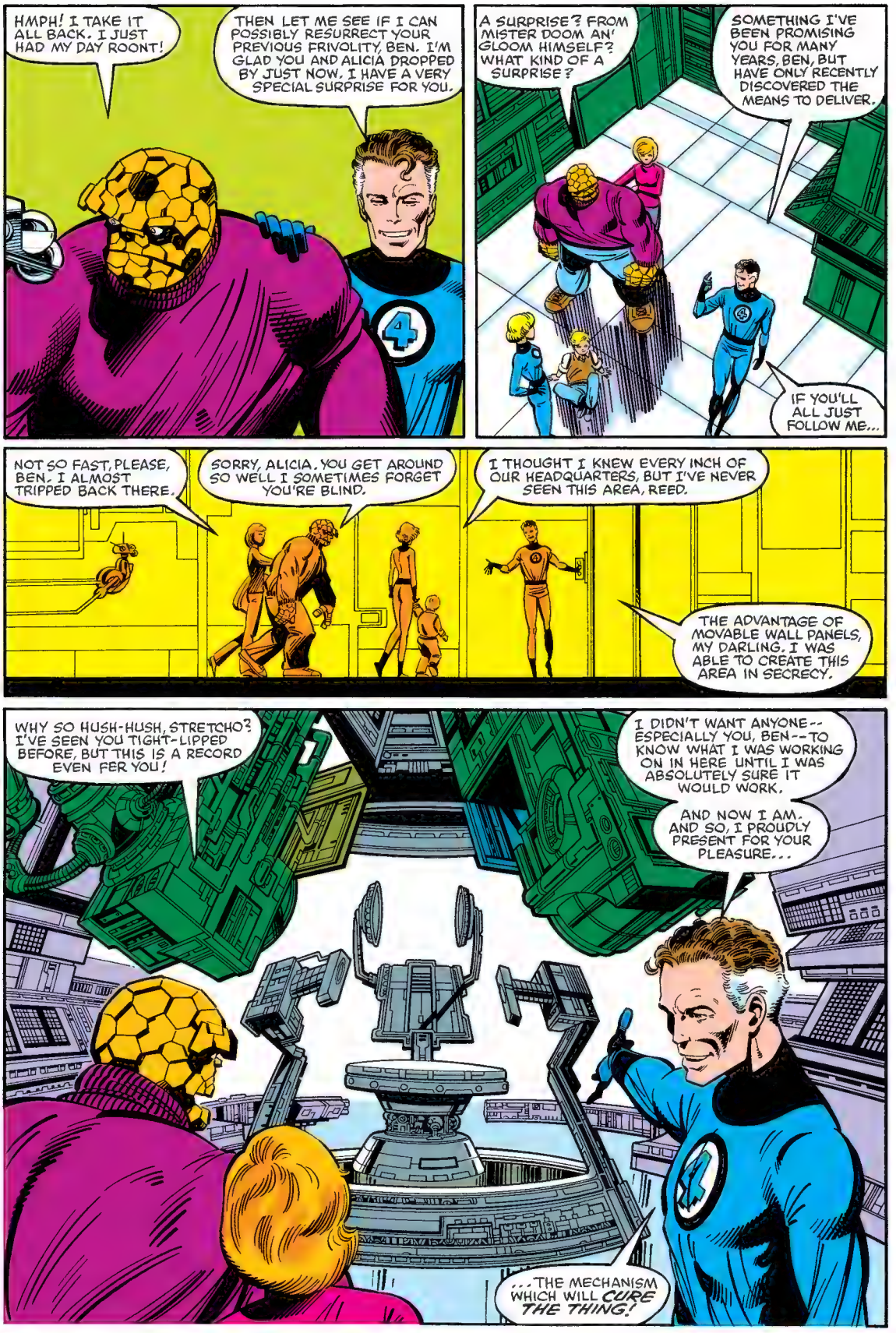
THE MORE THINGS CHANGE...

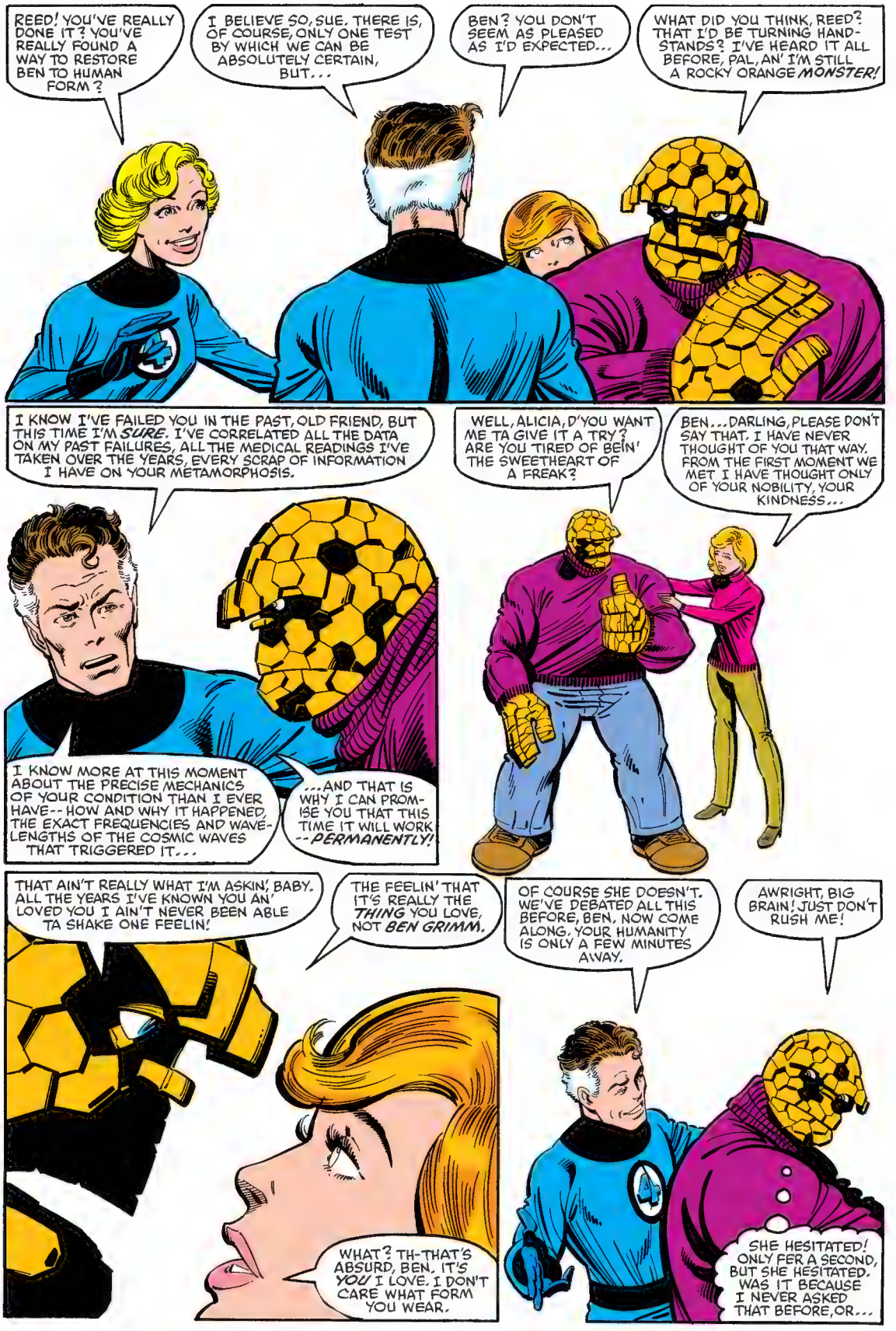

REED, BEN JUST CALLED. HE AND ALICIA ARE ON THEIR WAY OVER. WHAT DID YOU WANT TO SEE FRANKLIN IN HERE FOR?
OH, SINCE AGATHA HARKNESS CEASED TO BE OUR SON'S GOVERNESS WE'VE BEEN UNFAIRLY IMPOSING ON ALICIA TO TAKE CARE OF HIM WHEN WE'RE BUSY.
SO I'VE DESIGNED A LITTLE SOMETHING TO TAKE CARE OF THAT PROBLEM.
IT HAS BEEN JUST OVER TWO WEEKS SINCE JOHNNY STORM INTRODUCED A DRAMATICALLY DIFFERENT FRANKIE RAYE TO THE FANTASTIC FOUR.
SINCE THEN, NOTHING MUCH HAS HAPPENED.

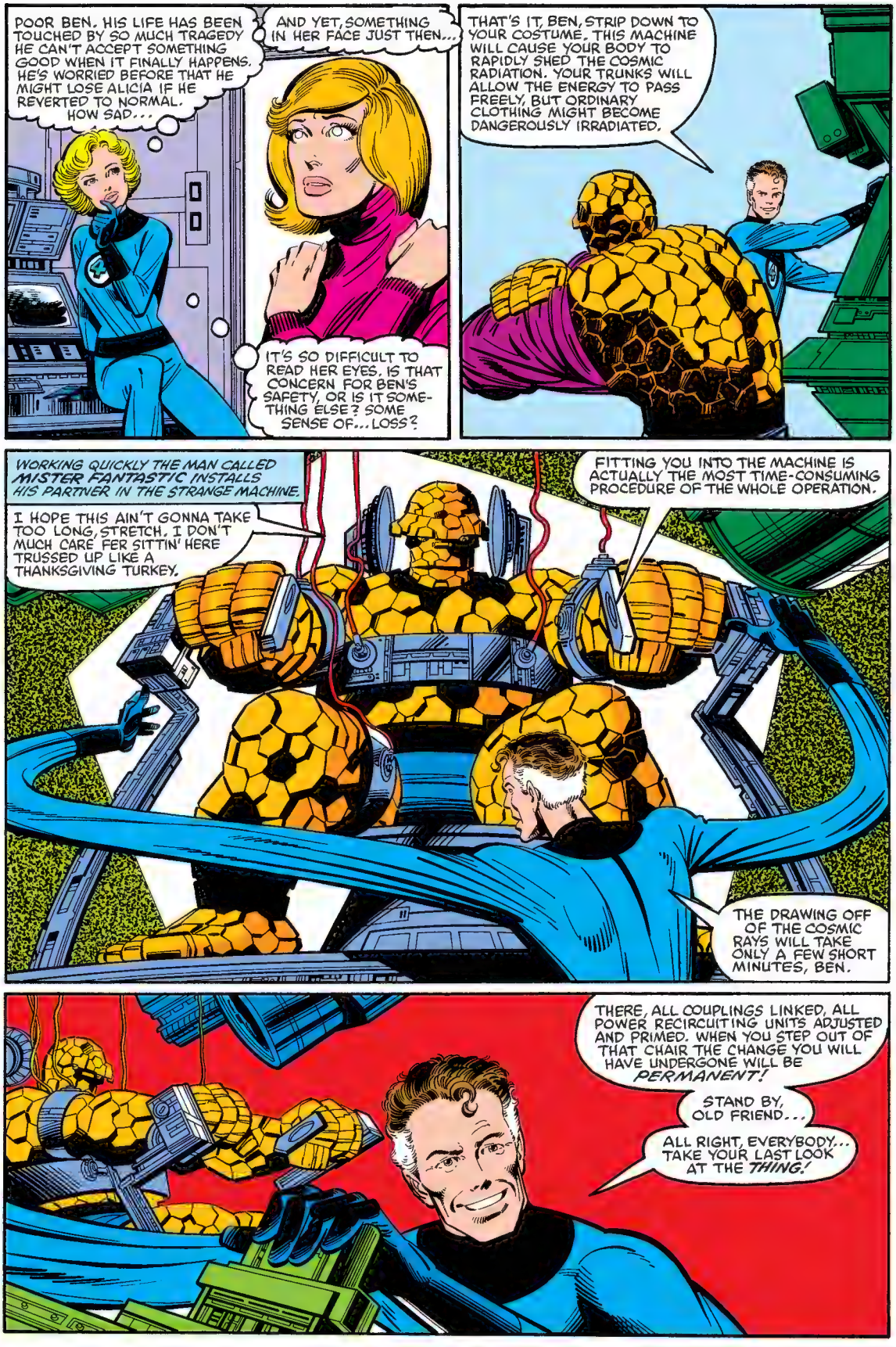

THAT IS ABOUT TO CHANGE.
BY MODIFYING THE CONSTRUCTION AND MOTIVATIONAL CIRCUITRY PLANS FOR OUR OLD H.E.R.B.I.E. ROBOT I'VE COME UP WITH THE PERFECT WATCHDOG FOR OUR PRECOCIOUS JUNIOR CONTINGENT.
SO COME ON OVER, FRANKLIN, AND MEET YOUR NEW BABY-SITTER.

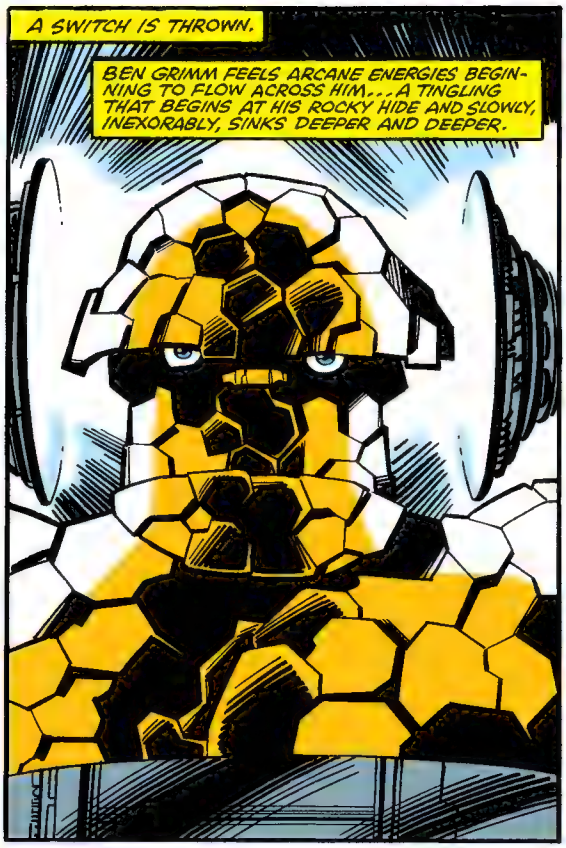

HEY, HE LOOKS KINDA LIKE THAT ROBOT UNCA BEN DIDN'T LIKE AN' FOUGHT WITH ALLA TIME. YOU WANNA FIGHT?
MEEP! MY FUNCTIONS DO NOT INCLUDE HOSTILE ACTIVITY DIRECTED AGAINST ANY MEMBER OF THIS HOUSEHOLD. MEEP!

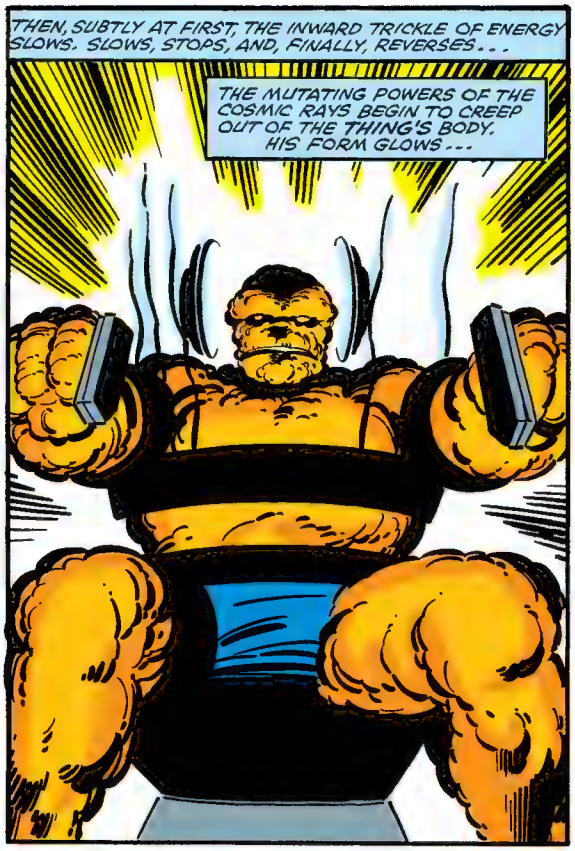

THAT'S GOING TO BABY-SIT OUR SON? DON'T YOU THINK ITS MANNER OF SPEECH IS A BIT MECHANICAL, REED? I DON'T WANT FRANKLIN TO GROW UP TALKING LIKE WEBSTER'S NEW COLLEGIATE DICTIONARY...
NOT LIKE ME, YOU MEAN? DON'T WORRY, SUE, THE ROBOT IS NOW OPERATING IN ITS PRIMARY LANGUAGE CYCLE, BUT THE PROGRAMMING IS OPEN-ENDED, IT WILL ADJUST TO FRANKLIN'S OWN SPEECH IDIOMS, AT THE SAME TIME INSTRUCTHIM IN PROPER GRAMMATICAL USAGE.
THERE'S ALSO A MONITORING SYSTEM DESIGNED TO KEEP WATCH ON OUR YOUNG LAD'S DEVELOPING MUTANT ABILITIES, THAT WAY I'LL BE ABLE TO KEEP A DISCREET EYE ON ANY MANIFESTATIONS OF FRANKLIN'S POWERS. AND, HOPEFULLY DETERMINE THEIR EXACT NATURE.
HA HA HA HA
¡EEEM!
JUST THEN...
HEADS UP, EVERYBODY! YER FAVORITE BLUE-EYED IDOL OF MILLIONS IS HERE TA BRIGHTEN YER DAY AN' SPREAD SUNSHINE AN' SWEETNESS WHEREVER HE GOES--WITH THE EVER-ABLE ASSISTANCE OF JUST THE MOST GORGEOUS AND TALENTED LITTLE SCULPTRESS THIS SIDE OF ANYWHERE, MISS ALICIA MASTERS!
BEN...
HEY, I'M IN A GOOD MOOD TODAY, BABY, AN' AIN'T NOTHIN' GONNA SPOIL...
MEEP!
...IT...
HERBIE!
HE'S BACK! HE'S BACK! DON'T WORRY, EVERYBODY! I'LL SMASH HIM!
GRUNCH!
MEEP!
NO, BEN! IT'S NOT HERBIE! IT IS FRANKLIN'S NEW BABY-SITTER!
HUH?

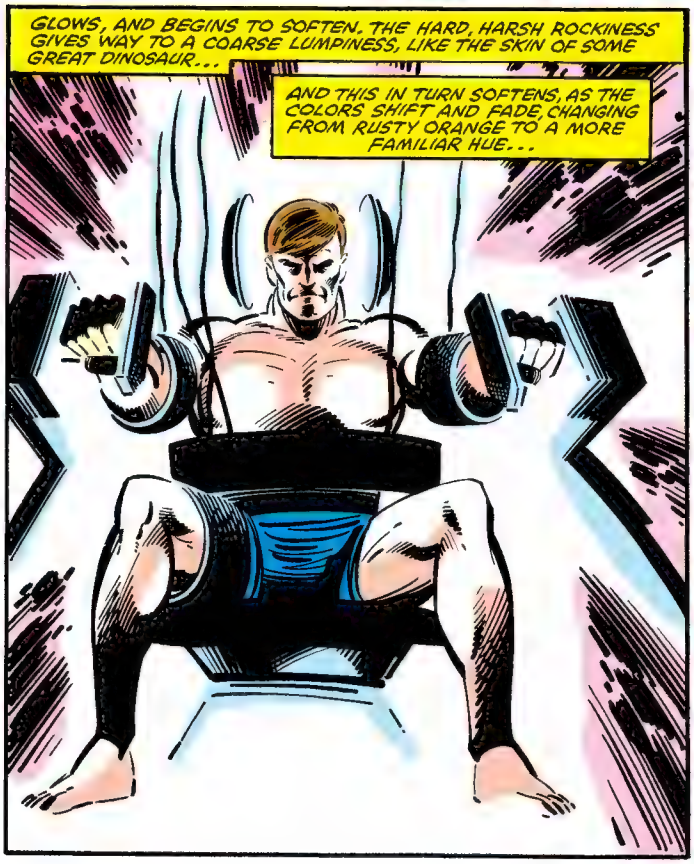

HMPH! I TAKE IT ALL BACK. I JUST HAD MY DAY ROONT!
THEN LET ME SEE IF I CAN POSSIBLY RESURRECT YOUR PREVIOUS FRIVOLITY, BEN. I'M GLAD YOU AND ALICIA DROPPED BY JUST NOW. I HAVE A VERY SPECIAL SURPRISE FOR YOU.
A SURPRISE? FROM MISTER DOOM AN' GLOOM HIMSELF? WHAT KIND OF A SURPRISE?
SOMETHING I'VE BEEN PROMISING YOU FOR MANY YEARS, BEN, BUT HAVE ONLY RECENTLY DISCOVERED THE MEANS TO DELIVER.
IF YOU'LL ALL JUST FOLLOW ME...
NOT SO FAST, PLEASE, BEN. I ALMOST TRIPPED BACK THERE.
SORRY, ALICIA. YOU GET AROUND SO WELL I SOMETIMES FORGET YOU'RE BLIND.
I THOUGHT I KNEW EVERY INCH OF OUR HEADQUARTERS, BUT I'VE NEVER SEEN THIS AREA, REED.
THE ADVANTAGE OF MOVABLE WALL PANELS, MY DARLING. I WAS ABLE TO CREATE THIS AREA IN SECRECY.
WHY SO HUSH-HUSH, STRETCHO? I'VE SEEN YOU TIGHT-LIPPED BEFORE, BUT THIS IS A RECORD EVEN FER YOU!
I DIDN'T WANT ANYONE--ESPECIALLY YOU, BEN--TO KNOW WHAT I WAS WORKING ON IN HERE UNTIL I WAS ABSOLUTELY SURE IT WOULD WORK.
AND NOW I AM. AND SO, I PROUDLY PRESENT FOR YOUR PLEASURE...
...THE MECHANISM WHICH WILL CURE THE THING!


REED! YOU'VE REALLY DONE IT? YOU'VE REALLY FOUND A WAY TO RESTORE BEN TO HUMAN FORM?
I BELIEVE SO, SUE. THERE IS, OF COURSE, ONLY ONE TEST BY WHICH WE CAN BE ABSOLUTELY CERTAIN, BUT...
BEN? YOU DON'T SEEM AS PLEASED AS I'D EXPECTED...
WHAT DID YOU THINK, REED? THAT I'D BE TURNING HAND-STANDS? I'VE HEARD IT ALL BEFORE, PAL, AN' I'M STILL A ROCKY ORANGE MONSTER!
I KNOW I'VE FAILED YOU IN THE PAST, OLD FRIEND, BUT THIS TIME I'M SURE. I'VE CORRELATED ALL THE DATA ON MY PAST FAILURES, ALL THE MEDICAL READINGS I'VE TAKEN OVER THE YEARS, EVERY SCRAP OF INFORMATION I HAVE ON YOUR METAMORPHOSIS.
I KNOW MORE AT THIS MOMENT ABOUT THE PRECISE MECHANICS OF YOUR CONDITION THAN I EVER HAVE-- HOW AND WHY IT HAPPENED, THE EXACT FREQUENCIES AND WAVE-LENGTHS OF THE COSMIC WAVES THAT TRIGGERED IT...
...AND THAT IS WHY I CAN PROM-ISE YOU THAT THIS TIME IT WILL WORK --PERMANENTLY!
WELL, ALICIA, D'YOU WANT ME TA GIVE IT A TRY? ARE YOU TIRED OF BEIN' THE SWEETHEART OF A FREAK?
BEN...DARLING, PLEASE DON'T SAY THAT. I HAVE NEVER THOUGHT OF YOU THAT WAY. FROM THE FIRST MOMENT WE MET I HAVE THOUGHT ONLY OF YOUR NOBILITY, YOUR KINDNESS...
THAT AIN'T REALLY WHAT I'M ASKIN', BABY. ALL THE YEARS I'VE KNOWN YOU AN' LOVED YOU I AIN'T NEVER BEEN ABLE TA SHAKE ONE FEELIN!
THE FEELIN' THAT IT'S REALLY THE THING YOU LOVE, NOT BEN GRIMM.
WHAT? TH-THAT'S ABSURD, BEN. IT'S YOU I LOVE. I DON'T CARE WHAT FORM YOU WEAR.
OF COURSE SHE DOESN'T. WE'VE DEBATED ALL THIS BEFORE, BEN, NOW COME ALONG. YOUR HUMANITY IS ONLY A FEW MINUTES AWAY.
AWRIGHT, BIG BRAIN! JUST DON'T RUSH ME!
SHE HESITATED! ONLY FER A SECOND, BUT SHE HESITATED. WAS IT BECAUSE I NEVER ASKED THAT BEFORE, OR...


POOR BEN. HIS LIFE HAS BEEN TOUCHED BY SO MUCH TRAGEDY HE CAN'T ACCEPT SOMETHING GOOD WHEN IT FINALLY HAPPENS. HE'S WORRIED BEFORE THAT HE MIGHT LOSE ALICIA IF HE REVERTED TO NORMAL. HOW SAD...
AND YET, SOMETHING IN HER FACE JUST THEN...
IT'S SO DIFFICULT TO READ HER EYES, IS THAT CONCERN FOR BEN'S SAFETY, OR IS IT SOMETHING ELSE? SOME SENSE OF...LOSS?
THAT'S IT, BEN, STRIP DOWN TO YOUR COSTUME. THIS MACHINE WILL CAUSE YOUR BODY TO RAPIDLY SHED THE COSMIC RADIATION. YOUR TRUNKS WILL ALLOW THE ENERGY TO PASS FREELY, BUT ORDINARY CLOTHING MIGHT BECOME DANGEROUSLY IRRADIATED.
WORKING QUICKLY THE MAN CALLED MISTER FANTASTIC INSTALLS HIS PARTNER IN THE STRANGE MACHINE.
I HOPE THIS AIN'T GONNA TAKE TOO LONG, STRETCH. I DON'T MUCH CARE FER SITTIN' HERE TRUSSED UP LIKE A THANKSGIVING TURKEY.
FITTING YOU INTO THE MACHINE IS ACTUALLY THE MOST TIME-CONSUMING PROCEDURE OF THE WHOLE OPERATION.
THE DRAWING OFF OF THE COSMIC RAYS WILL TAKE ONLY A FEW SHORT MINUTES, BEN.
THERE, ALL COUPLINGS LINKED, ALL POWER RECIRCUITING UNITS ADJUSTED AND PRIMED. WHEN YOU STEP OUT OF THAT CHAIR THE CHANGE YOU WILL HAVE UNDERGONE WILL BE PERMANENT!
STAND BY, OLD FRIEND...
ALL RIGHT, EVERYBODY... TAKE YOUR LAST LOOK AT THE THING!


A SWITCH IS THROWN.
BEN GRIMM FEELS ARCANE ENERGIES BEGINNING TO FLOW ACROSS HIM...A TINGLING THAT BEGINS AT HIS ROCKY HIDE AND SLOWLY, INEXORABLY, SINKS DEEPER AND DEEPER.


THEN, SUBTLY AT FIRST, THE INWARD TRICKLE OF ENERGY SLOWS. SLOWS, STOPS, AND, FINALLY, REVERSES...
THE MUTATING POWERS OF THE COSMIC RAYS BEGIN TO CREEP OUT OF THE THING'S BODY. HIS FORM GLOWS...


GLOWS, AND BEGINS TO SOFTEN. THE HARD, HARSH ROCKINESS GIVES WAY TO A COARSE LUMPINESS, LIKE THE SKIN OF SOME GREAT DINOSAUR...
AND THIS IN TURN SOFTENS, AS THE COLORS SHIFT AND FADE, CHANGING FROM RUSTY ORANGE TO A MORE FAMILIAR HUE...

BUT, AS THE ALMOST-HUMAN BEN GRIMM SQUINTS THROUGH THE SHIMMERING LIGHT THAT SURROUNDS HIM...

REED!
THE POWER-INTERFACE CIRCUIT DISRUPTORS! THEY'RE SHORTING OUT!
SKTZZKK!
SUE -- PROTECT FRANKLIN AND ALICIA WITH YOUR FORCE-FIELD!
I'VE GOT TO GET THROUGH TO BEN! GOT TO DIS-CONNECT...UNGH!
BOOM!
ALICIA--STOP! YOU CAN'T GET THROUGH MY FORCE-FIELD!
BEN! BEN ARE YOU ALRIGHT? I HEARD THAT AWFUL EXPLOSION! BEN!
I CAN'T SEE ANYTHING FOR THE SMOKE. THE WHOLE CONDENSER UNIT MUST HAVE BLOWN-- BUT HOW...WHY...?
ONLY A MASSIVE POWER FEEDBACK COULD CAUSE...
UNHHH...
BEN! BEN, CAN YOU HEAR ME? ARE YOU ALRIGHT?
NO...
NO, I AIN'T ALRIGHT...

"I AIN'T NEVER GONNA BE ALL RIGHT AGAIN..."
THE BRUTE-LIKE FIGURE LUMBERS SMOULDERING FROM THE SMOKE, AND REED RICHARDS CAN ONLY GAPE IN AWE AND HORROR.
THIS SHOULD NOT--COULD NOT HAVE HAPPENED...ALL HIS TESTS PROVED THAT THIS WOULD CURE THE THING.
INSTEAD, HE FACES AN EARLIER FORM--A LESS EVOLVED FORM OF HIS PARTNER.
AND REED KNOWS THAT WHAT HE SAID BEFORE HOLDS TRUE. NO KNOWN POWER CAN UNDO THIS TRANSFORMATION.
THIS TIME IT IS PERMANENT!

NEXT ISSUE

MORE ON THE MOST DRAMATIC DEVELOPMENT OF THE THING'S CAREER, PLUS THE MOST UNEXPECTED GUEST STAR OF ALL! BE HERE FOR...

WENDY'S FRIENDS...

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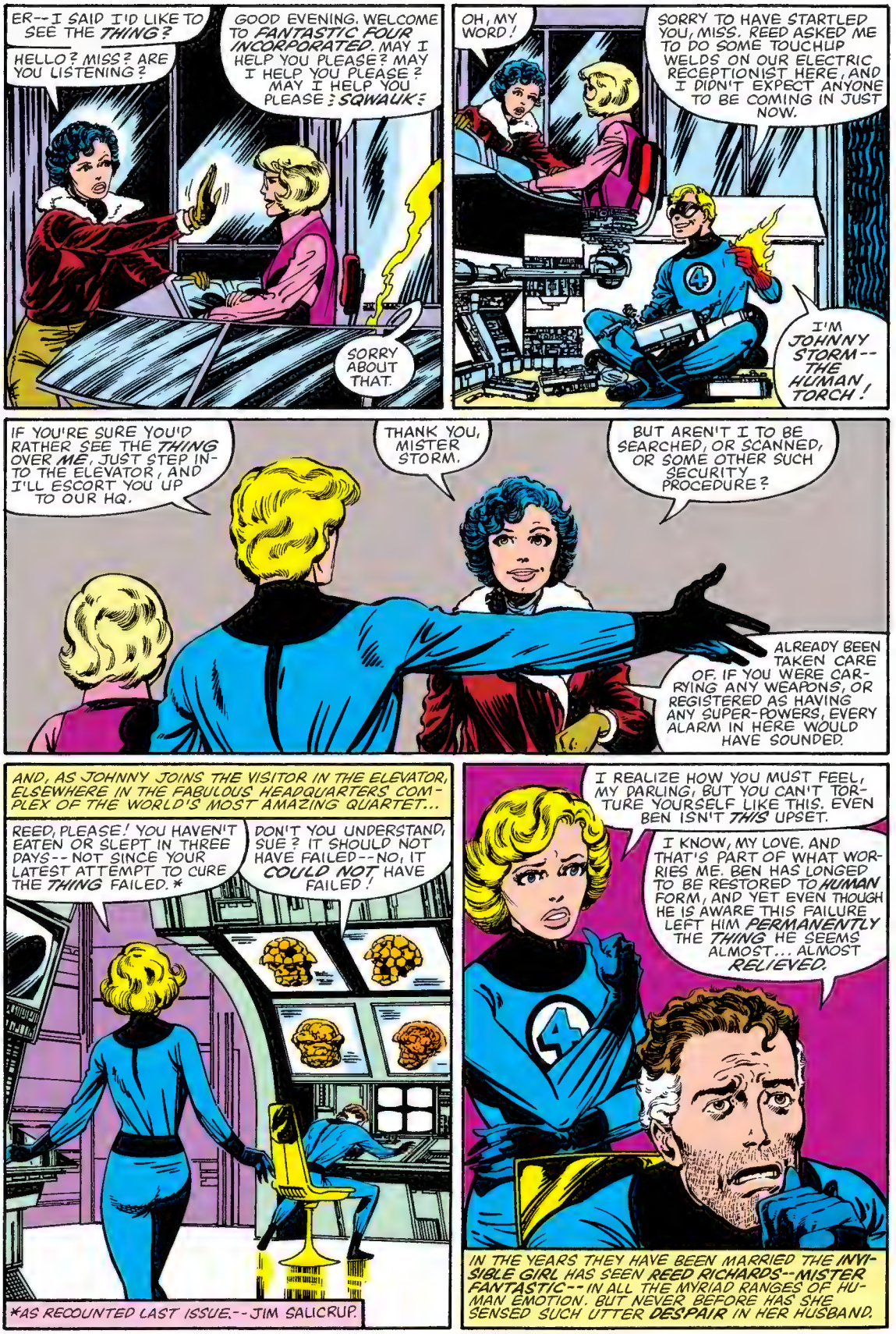
HOLOCAUST IN THE DESERT!
PLUS: THE MOST UNEXPECTED GUEST-STAR OF ALL TIME!

Reed Richards! Ben Grimm! Sue Richards! Johnny Storm! Together they braved the unknown terrors of outer space and were changed into something more than human! MR. FANTASTIC! THE THING! THE INVISIBLE GIRL! THE HUMAN TORCH! And now the world will never again be the same!

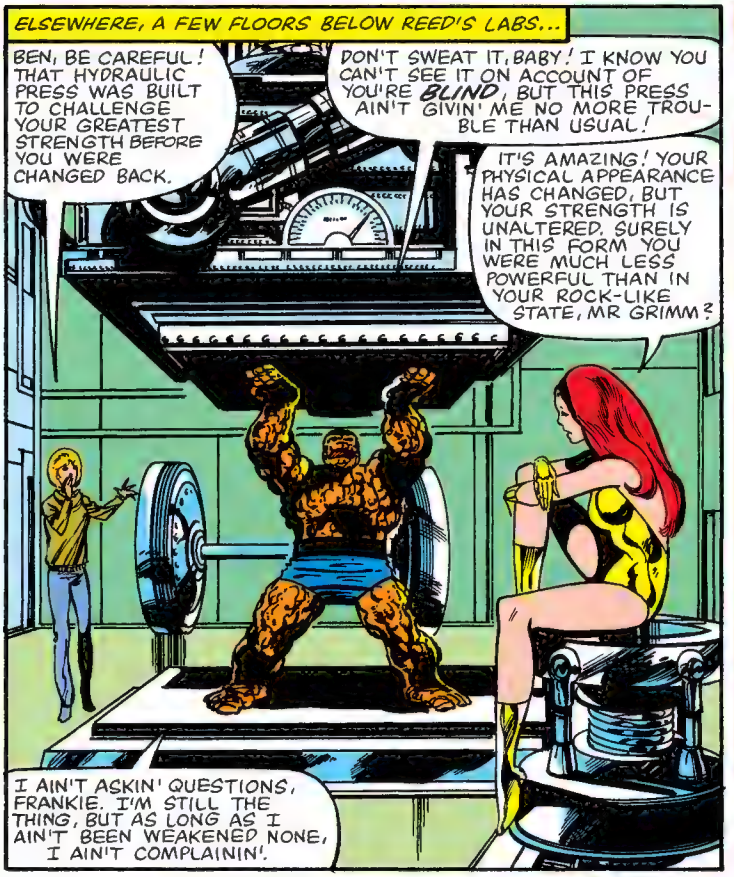
Stan Lee PRESENTS: THE FANTASTIC FOUR!®

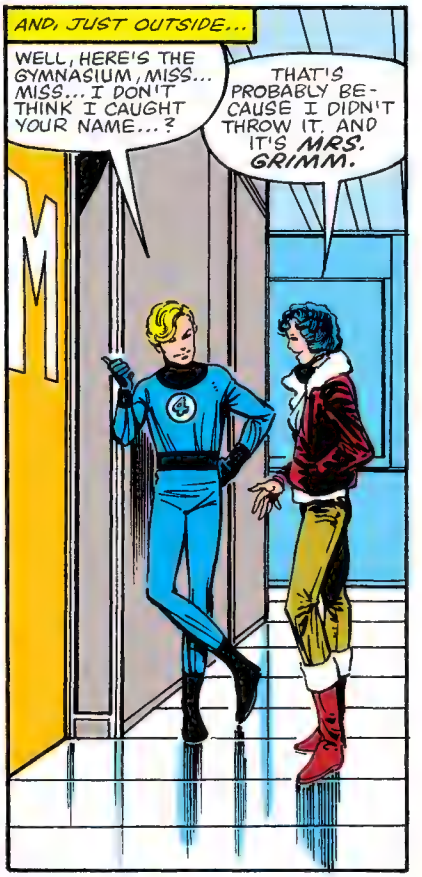
TUESDAY, NOVEMBER 17TH. NEW YORK CITY.
THE LADY IS A LONG WAY FROM HOME. HER MISSION IS, VERY LITERALLY, ONE OF LIFE OR DEATH.
BAXTER BUILDING
THE BAXTER BUILDING. I'VE OFTEN WONDERED IF I'D EVER ACTUALLY COME HERE.
IT'S BEEN SO LONG--SO MANY YEARS SINCE WE LAST SAW EACH OTHER. I WONDER IF HE EVER THINKS OF ME--OF US.
SHE LEFT ARIZONA A WEEK AGO, BOUND FOR THE BIG APPLE. IT HAD BEEN HER IDEA, AND HER RESOLVE HAD BEEN CERTAIN.
NOW, SHE HESITATES FOR THE SPACE OF SEVERAL HEARTBEATS. IS THIS THE RIGHT THING TO DO? SHOULD SHE TURN BACK NOW?

EXCUSE ME--YOU MUST BE O'HOOLIHAN, THE DOORMAN. I WONDER IF YOU COULD TELL ME HOW TO GET UP TO THE FANTASTIC FOUR'S HEADQUARTERS ON THE TOP FIVE FLOORS OF THIS BUILDING.
SURE, AN' TIS IN LUCK THAT YOU ARE, MISS. THE FF HAVE JUST THIS WEEK OPENED A PUBLIC RECEPTION OFFICE ON THE FLOOR BELOW THEIR HQ. JUST TAKE ANY ELEVATOR TO THE THIRTIETH FLOOR AND LOOK FOR ROOM 30C.
BAXTER BLDG.
BB
THANK YOU VERY MUCH.
NOW THERE'S WHAT I'M THINKIN' IS A FOIN BROTH OF A GIRL. WHAT BUSINESS IS IT SUCH AS SHE WOULD BE HAVIN' WITH THE LIKES OF THE FANTASTIC FOUR? COULD IT BE THAT --PERISH FORBID-- SHE'S ONE O' THEM WRETCHED SUPER-VILLAINS?
AN' HOW DID SHE COME T' BE KNOWIN' ME NAME?
TEK
CLIC
30C
GOOD EVENING. WELCOME TO FANTASTIC FOUR INCORPORATED. MAY I HELP YOU PLEASE?
AH... YES. I DON'T HAVE AN APPOINTMENT, BUT IT'S URGENT THAT I SEE BEN GRIMM-- THE THING!
GOOD EVENING. WELCOME TO FANTASTIC FOUR INCORPORATED. MAY I HELP YOU PLEASE?

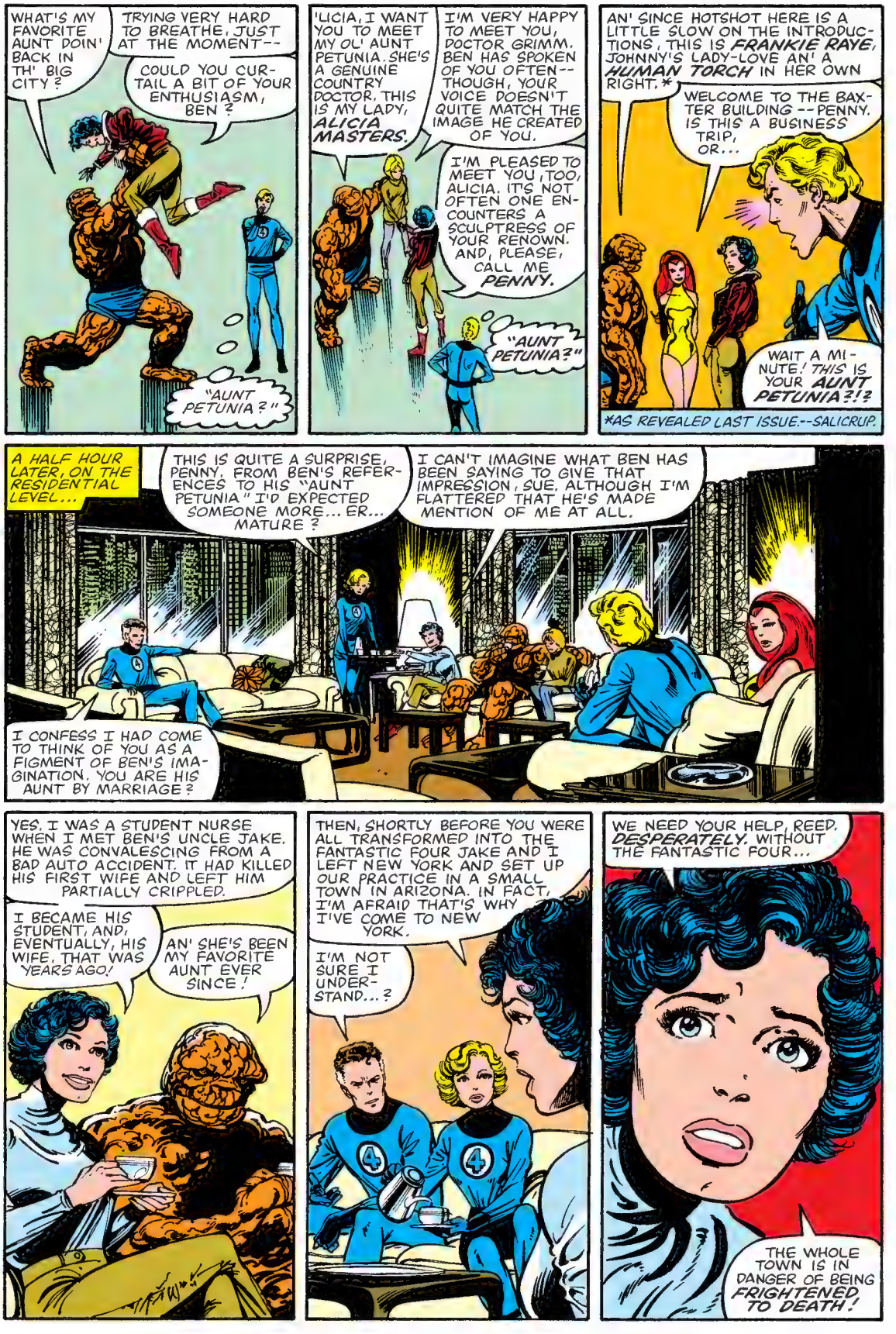

ER--I SAID I'D LIKE TO SEE THE THING?
HELLO? MISS? ARE YOU LISTENING?
GOOD EVENING. WELCOME TO FANTASTIC FOUR INCORPORATED. MAY I HELP YOU PLEASE? MAY I HELP YOU PLEASE? MAY I HELP YOU PLEASE? SQWAUK!
SORRY ABOUT THAT.
OH, MY WORD!
SORRY TO HAVE STARTLED YOU, MISS. REED ASKED ME TO DO SOME TOUCHUP WELDS ON OUR ELECTRIC RECEPTIONIST HERE, AND I DIDN'T EXPECT ANYONE TO BE COMING IN JUST NOW.
I'M JOHNNY STORM--THE HUMAN TORCH!
IF YOU'RE SURE YOU'D RATHER SEE THE THING OVER ME, JUST STEP INTO THE ELEVATOR, AND I'LL ESCORT YOU UP TO OUR HQ.
THANK YOU, MISTER STORM.
BUT AREN'T I TO BE SEARCHED, OR SCANNED, OR SOME OTHER SUCH SECURITY PROCEDURE?
ALREADY BEEN TAKEN CARE OF. IF YOU WERE CARRYING ANY WEAPONS, OR REGISTERED AS HAVING ANY SUPER-POWERS, EVERY ALARM IN HERE WOULD HAVE SOUNDED.
AND, AS JOHNNY JOINS THE VISITOR IN THE ELEVATOR, ELSEWHERE IN THE FABULOUS HEADQUARTERS COMPLEX OF THE WORLD'S MOST AMAZING QUARTET...
REED, PLEASE! YOU HAVEN'T EATEN OR SLEPT IN THREE DAYS--NOT SINCE YOUR LATEST ATTEMPT TO CURE THE THING FAILED.*
DON'T YOU UNDERSTAND, SUE? IT SHOULD NOT HAVE FAILED--NO, IT COULD NOT HAVE FAILED!
*AS RECOUNTED LAST ISSUE.--JIM SALICRUP.
I REALIZE HOW YOU MUST FEEL, MY DARLING, BUT YOU CAN'T TORTURE YOURSELF LIKE THIS. EVEN BEN ISN'T THIS UPSET.
I KNOW, MY LOVE. AND THAT'S PART OF WHAT WORRIES ME. BEN HAS LONGED TO BE RESTORED TO HUMAN FORM, AND YET EVEN THOUGH HE IS AWARE THIS FAILURE LEFT HIM PERMANENTLY THE THING HE SEEMS ALMOST... ALMOST RELIEVED.
IN THE YEARS THEY HAVE BEEN MARRIED THE INVISIBLE GIRL HAS SEEN REED RICHARDS--MISTER FANTASTIC--IN ALL THE MYRIAD RANGES OF HUMAN EMOTION. BUT NEVER BEFORE HAS SHE SENSED SUCH UTTER DESPAIR IN HER HUSBAND.

YOU KNOW HOW BEN IS, REED. HE'S LONG SINCE LEARNED HOW TO MASK HIS TRUE FEELINGS -- THE TERRIBLE ANGUISH HE FEELS BEING TRAPPED IN THE BODY OF THE THING. BUT YOU ALSO KNOW THAT HE NO LONGER BLAMES YOU FOR HIS CONDITION.
WE ALL TOOK THE SAME RISKS WHEN WE FLEW INTO THE COSMIC RAY FIELD. ANY OF US COULD HAVE BEEN TRANSFORMED INTO A MONSTER AS BEN WAS, OR EVEN SOMETHING FAR WORSE.
NOW, PLEASE, YOU MUST GET SOME REST, SOMETHING TO EAT...
YOU'RE RIGHT OF COURSE, MY DARLING. BUT I CAN ONLY PAUSE FOR A SHORT WHILE. I MUST DISCOVER WHAT CAUSED THE FEED-BACK IN THE MACHINE I BUILT TO CURE BEN.
I MUST FIND OUT WHY, INSTEAD OF BEING RETURNED TO HUMAN FORM, HE WAS REGRESSED TO AN EARLIER, LESS EVOLVED VERSION OF THE THING, PERMANENTLY!


ELSEWHERE, A FEW FLOORS BELOW REED'S LABS...
BEN, BE CAREFUL! THAT HYDRAULIC PRESS WAS BUILT TO CHALLENGE YOUR GREATEST STRENGTH BEFORE YOU WERE CHANGED BACK.
DON'T SWEAT IT, BABY! I KNOW YOU CAN'T SEE IT ON ACCOUNT OF YOU'RE BLIND, BUT THIS PRESS AIN'T GIVIN' ME NO MORE TROUBLE THAN USUAL!
IT'S AMAZING! YOUR PHYSICAL APPEARANCE HAS CHANGED, BUT YOUR STRENGTH IS UNALTERED. SURELY IN THIS FORM YOU WERE MUCH LESS POWERFUL THAN IN YOUR ROCK-LIKE STATE, MR GRIMM?
I AIN'T ASKIN' QUESTIONS, FRANKIE. I'M STILL THE THING, BUT AS LONG AS I AIN'T BEEN WEAKENED NONE, I AIN'T COMPLAININ'.


AND, JUST OUTSIDE...
WELL, HERE'S THE GYMNASIUM, MISS... MISS... I DON'T THINK I CAUGHT YOUR NAME...?
THAT'S PROBABLY BECAUSE I DIDN'T THROW IT. AND IT'S MRS. GRIMM.

AUNT PETUNIA!
BEN!
"AUNT PETUNIA?"


WHAT'S MY FAVORITE AUNT DOIN' BACK IN TH' BIG CITY?
TRYING VERY HARD TO BREATHE, JUST AT THE MOMENT--
COULD YOU CURTAIL A BIT OF YOUR ENTHUSIASM, BEN?
"AUNT PETUNIA?"
'LICIA, I WANT YOU TO MEET MY OL' AUNT PETUNIA. SHE'S A GENUINE COUNTRY DOCTOR. THIS IS MY LADY, ALICIA MASTERS.
I'M VERY HAPPY TO MEET YOU, DOCTOR GRIMM. BEN HAS SPOKEN OF YOU OFTEN--THOUGH, YOUR VOICE DOESN'T QUITE MATCH THE IMAGE HE CREATED OF YOU.
I'M PLEASED TO MEET YOU, TOO, ALICIA. IT'S NOT OFTEN ONE ENCOUNTERS A SCULPTRESS OF YOUR RENOWN. AND, PLEASE, CALL ME PENNY.
"AUNT PETUNIA?"
AN' SINCE HOTSHOT HERE IS A LITTLE SLOW ON THE INTRODUCTIONS, THIS IS FRANKIE RAYE, JOHNNY'S LADY-LOVE AN' A HUMAN TORCH IN HER OWN RIGHT.*
WELCOME TO THE BAXTER BUILDING--PENNY. IS THIS A BUSINESS TRIP, OR...
WAIT A MINUTE! THIS IS YOUR AUNT PETUNIA?!?
*AS REVEALED LAST ISSUE.--SALICRUP.
A HALF HOUR LATER, ON THE RESIDENTIAL LEVEL...
THIS IS QUITE A SURPRISE, PENNY. FROM BEN'S REFERENCES TO HIS "AUNT PETUNIA" I'D EXPECTED SOMEONE MORE... ER... MATURE?
I CAN'T IMAGINE WHAT BEN HAS BEEN SAYING TO GIVE THAT IMPRESSION, SUE, ALTHOUGH I'M FLATTERED THAT HE'S MADE MENTION OF ME AT ALL.
I CONFESS I HAD COME TO THINK OF YOU AS A FIGMENT OF BEN'S IMAGINATION. YOU ARE HIS AUNT BY MARRIAGE?
YES, I WAS A STUDENT NURSE WHEN I MET BEN'S UNCLE JAKE. HE WAS CONVALESCING FROM A BAD AUTO ACCIDENT. IT HAD KILLED HIS FIRST WIFE AND LEFT HIM PARTIALLY CRIPPLED.
I BECAME HIS STUDENT, AND, EVENTUALLY, HIS WIFE. THAT WAS YEARS AGO!
AN' SHE'S BEEN MY FAVORITE AUNT EVER SINCE!
THEN, SHORTLY BEFORE YOU WERE ALL TRANSFORMED INTO THE FANTASTIC FOUR JAKE AND I LEFT NEW YORK AND SET UP OUR PRACTICE IN A SMALL TOWN IN ARIZONA. IN FACT, I'M AFRAID THAT'S WHY I'VE COME TO NEW YORK.
I'M NOT SURE I UNDERSTAND...?
WE NEED YOUR HELP, REED. DESPERATELY. WITHOUT THE FANTASTIC FOUR...
THE WHOLE TOWN IS IN DANGER OF BEING FRIGHTENED TO DEATH!

WENDY'S FRIENDS
TEN HOURS LATER, THE FANTASTICAR SLICES ACROSS THE EARLY MORNING SKY, HIGH OVER ARIZONA.
THIS IS INCREDIBLE! YOU MADE THE RETURN FLIGHT IN ONLY A FRACTION OF THE TIME A JET WOULD TAKE.
PREPARE FOR LANDING, EVERYONE. THAT'S BENSON BELOW.
SOME HOTSHOT TOWN YA PICKED FER YERSELF, A.P. ONE BLINK AN' I'D HAVE MISSED IT.
AW, QUIT GRIPING, THING. YOU'RE JUST JEALOUS 'CAUSE YOU COULDN'T FLY THE LAST TWENTY MILES UNDER YOUR OWN POWER, LIKE FRANKIE AN' ME.

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EDITOR

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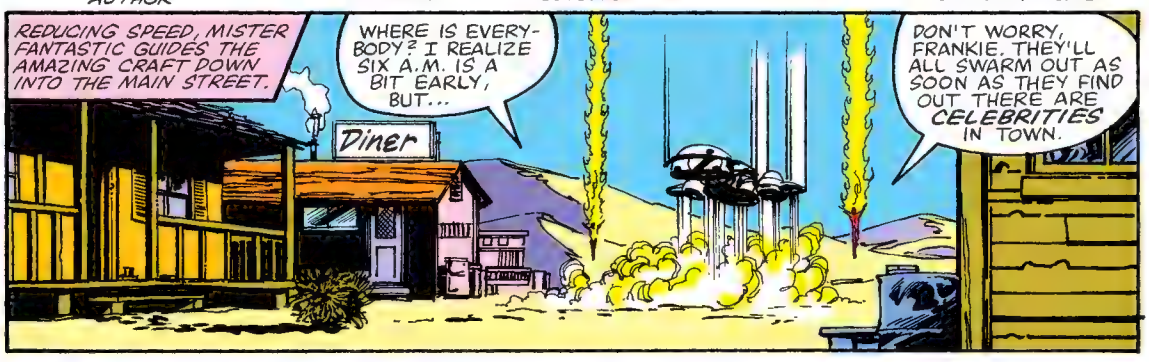
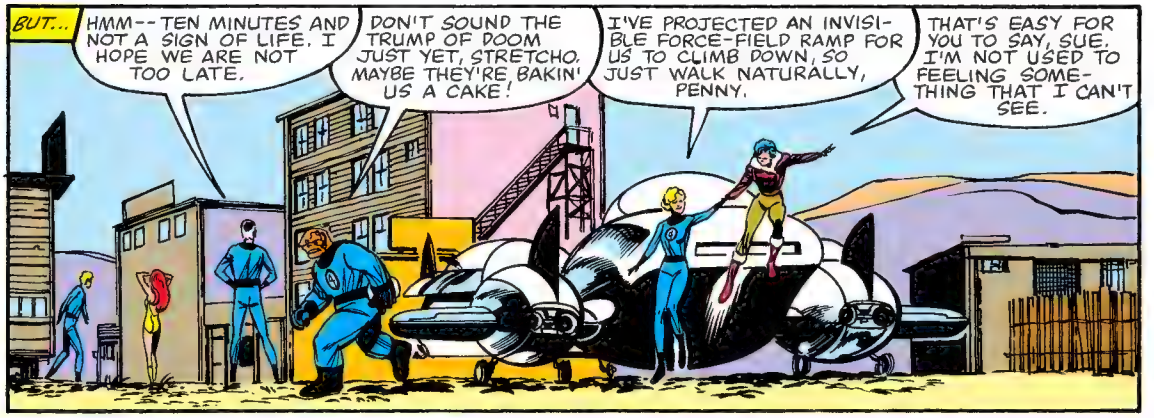
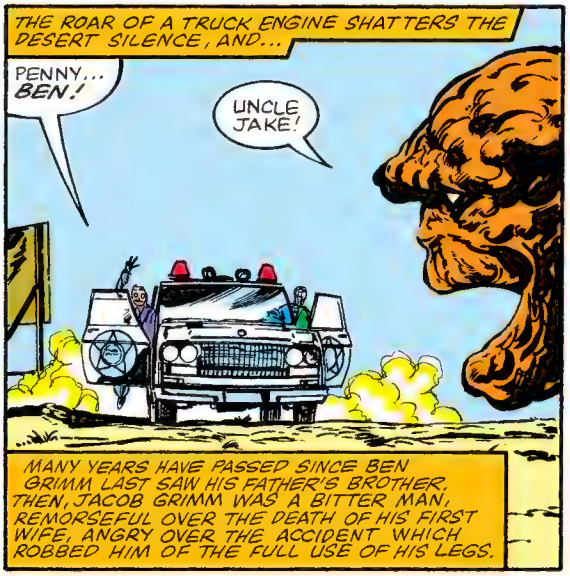

REDUCING SPEED, MISTER FANTASTIC GUIDES THE AMAZING CRAFT DOWN INTO THE MAIN STREET.
WHERE IS EVERYBODY? I REALIZE SIX A.M. IS A BIT EARLY, BUT...
Diner
DON'T WORRY, FRANKIE. THEY'LL ALL SWARM OUT AS SOON AS THEY FIND OUT THERE ARE CELEBRITIES IN TOWN.

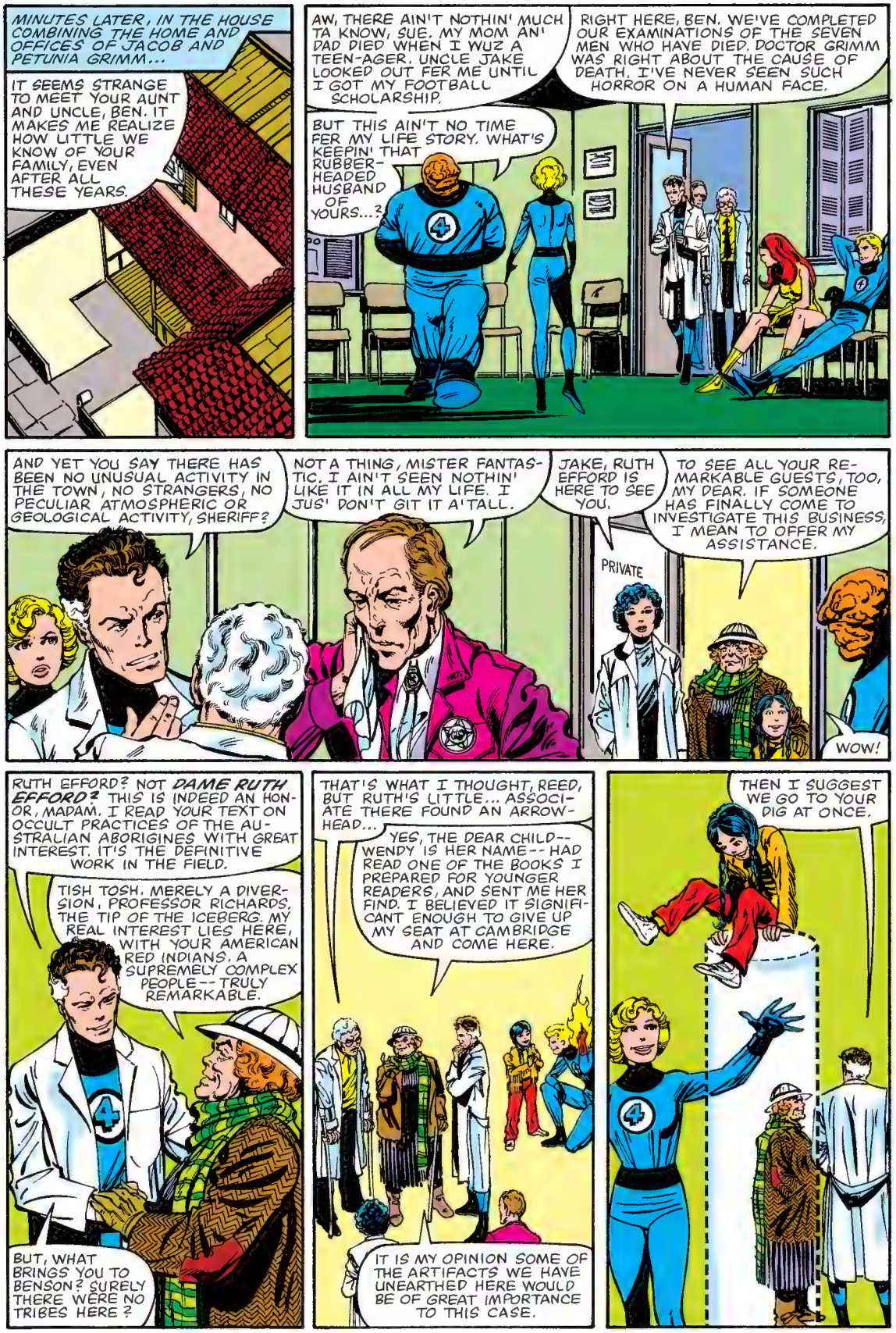

BUT...
HMM--TEN MINUTES AND NOT A SIGN OF LIFE. I HOPE WE ARE NOT TOO LATE.
DON'T SOUND THE TRUMP OF DOOM JUST YET, STRETCHO. MAYBE THEY'RE BAKIN' US A CAKE!
I'VE PROJECTED AN INVISIBLE FORCE-FIELD RAMP FOR US TO CLIMB DOWN, SO JUST WALK NATURALLY, PENNY.
THAT'S EASY FOR YOU TO SAY, SUE. I'M NOT USED TO FEELING SOMETHING THAT I CAN'T SEE.

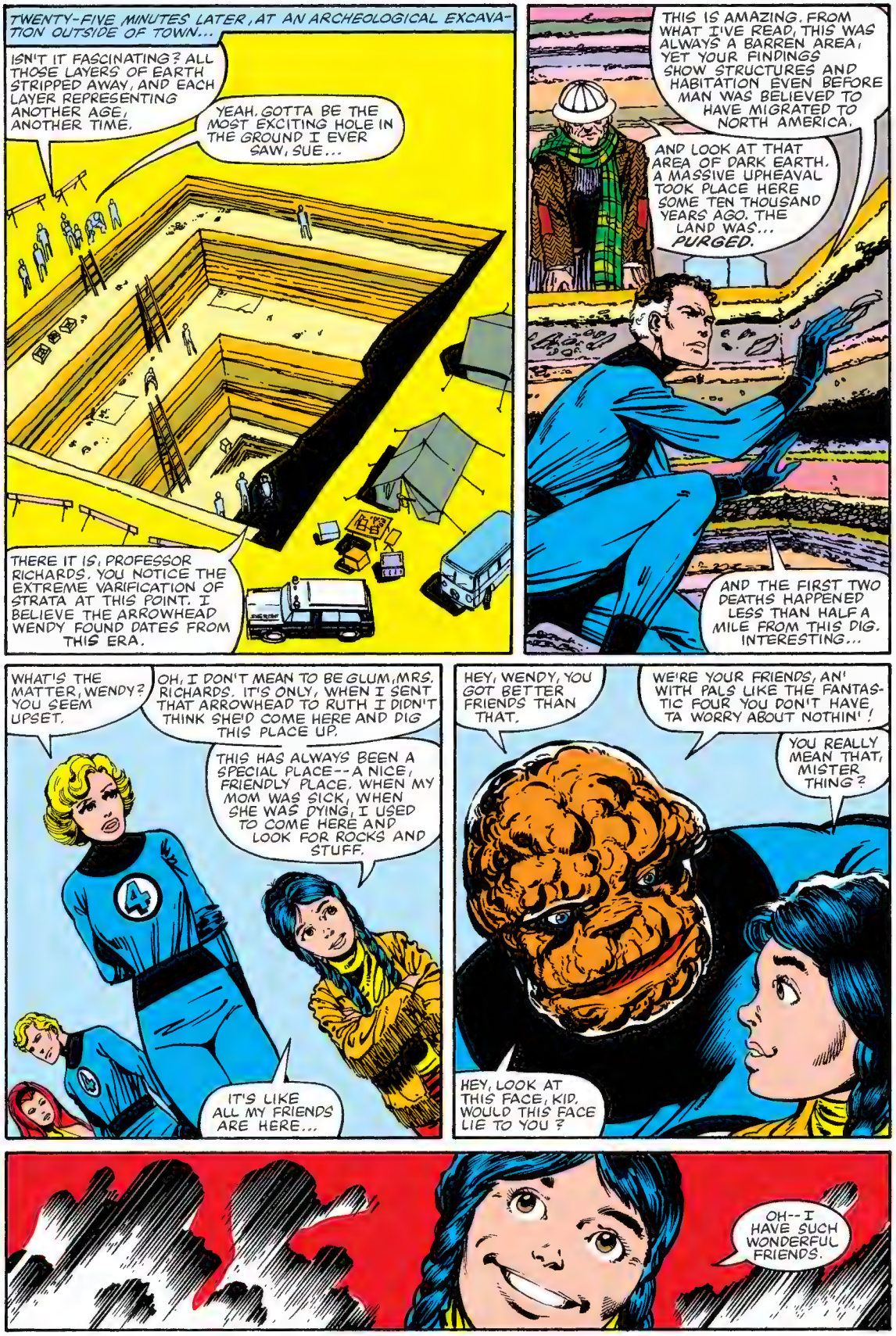
ANOTHER FIVE MINUTES CRAWL BY WITHOUT REACTION FROM THE TOWN...
LOOKS LIKE THE WHOLE TOWN'S SCRAMMED. AT LEAST THAT MEANS I CAN GET OUTTA THIS BLASTED MONKEY SUIT. * I DON'T KNOW WHY I LET YA TALK ME INTA WEARIN' IT ANYWAY.
BEN, WAIT. YOU AGREED TO DISGUISE YOUR APPEARANCE FOR GOOD REASON. PEOPLE IN THIS TOWN ARE BEING FRIGHTENED TO DEATH.
UNTIL WE DISCOVER THE CAUSE IT'S ADVISABLE TO KEEP THE THING UNDER WRAPS.
*LAST SEEN IN ISSUE #3.--JIM SALICRUP, OFFICIAL HISTORIAN.

SO STAY SUITED UP, BEN. OR WOULD YOU RATHER I KEEP YOU INVISIBLE WHILE WE'RE IN BENSON?
HEY! AW, C'MON, SUZIE! YOU KNOW HOW WEIRD IT MAKES SOMEBODY FEEL WHEN YA DO THIS. MAKE ME VISIBLE AGAIN AN' I'LL WEAR MY DANGED COSTUME.
LOOK ALIVE, PEOPLE. I THINK WE'VE GOT COMPANY.

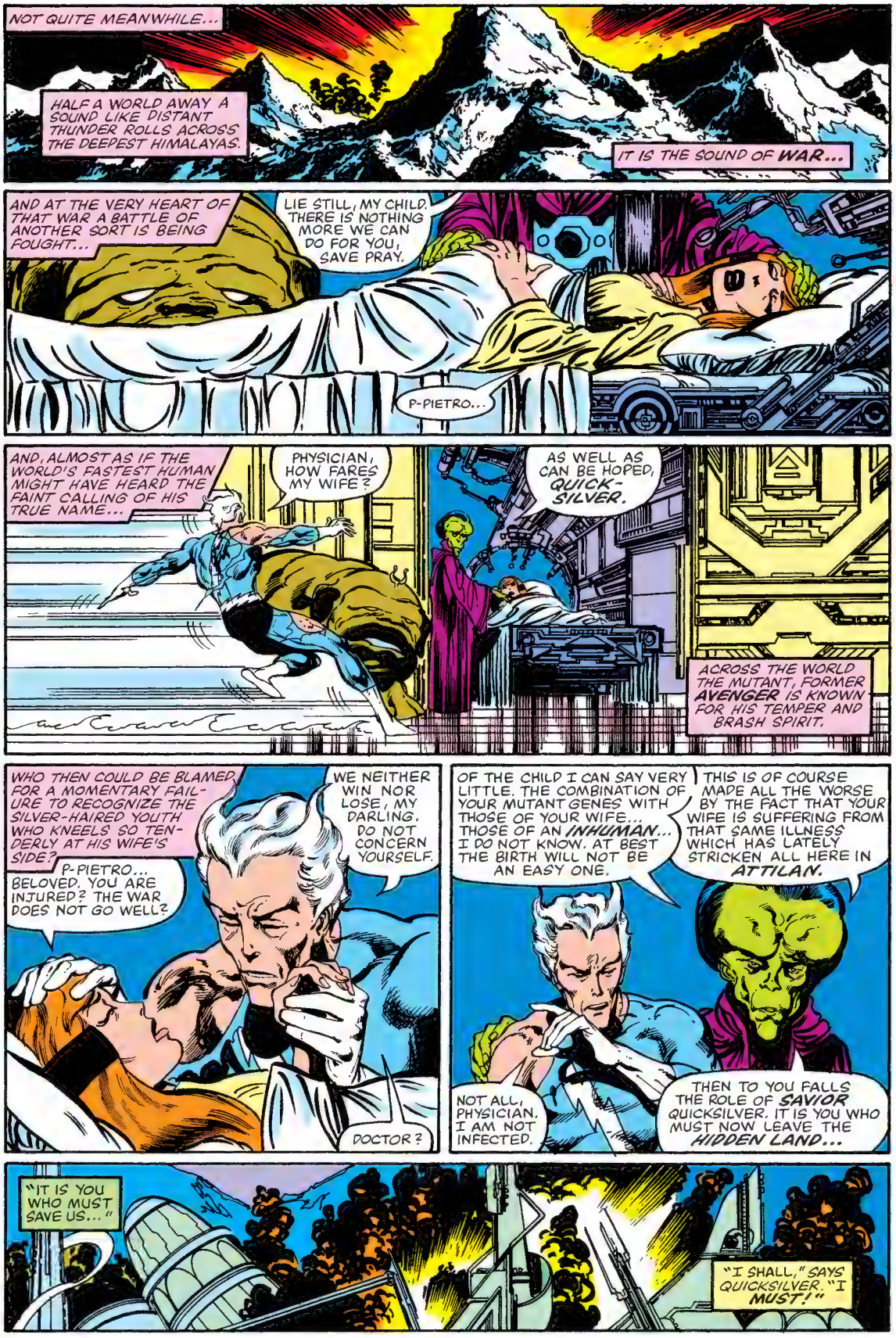

THE ROAR OF A TRUCK ENGINE SHATTERS THE DESERT SILENCE, AND...
PENNY... BEN!
UNCLE JAKE!
MANY YEARS HAVE PASSED SINCE BEN GRIMM LAST SAW HIS FATHER'S BROTHER. THEN, JACOB GRIMM WAS A BITTER MAN; REMORSEFUL OVER THE DEATH OF HIS FIRST WIFE, ANGRY OVER THE ACCIDENT WHICH ROBBED HIM OF THE FULL USE OF HIS LEGS.

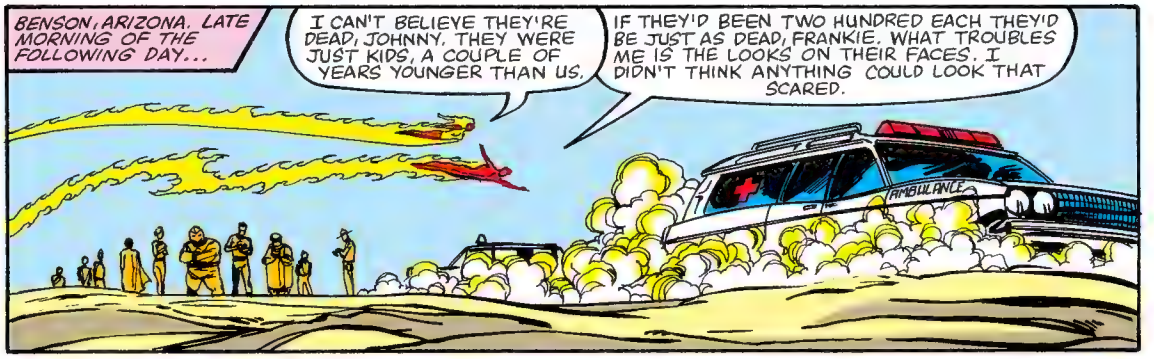
NOW, BEN CONFRONTS A CHANGED MAN--STILL CRIPPLED, BUT WITH AN ALMOST FORGOTTEN GLEAM IN HIS EYE, A SENSE OF PURPOSE, AN ALIVENESS.
BEN HAD BEEN THE ONLY ONE IN THE FAMILY WHO HAD APPROVED OF JAKE MARRYING THE MANY-YEARS YOUNGER PETUNIA, NOW HE SEES PROOF HE WAS RIGHT.
IT'S BEEN A LONG TIME, BEN. TOO LONG. I ONLY WISH YOU WERE HERE NOW UNDER BETTER CIRCUMSTANCES.
GOOD TA SEE YA, JAKE.


MINUTES LATER, IN THE HOUSE COMBINING THE HOME AND OFFICES OF JACOB AND PETUNIA GRIMM...
IT SEEMS STRANGE TO MEET YOUR AUNT AND UNCLE, BEN. IT MAKES ME REALIZE HOW LITTLE WE KNOW OF YOUR FAMILY, EVEN AFTER ALL THESE YEARS.
AW, THERE AIN'T NOTHIN' MUCH TA KNOW, SUE. MY MOM AN' PAD DIED WHEN I WUZ A TEEN-AGER. UNCLE JAKE LOOKED OUT FER ME UNTIL I GOT MY FOOTBALL SCHOLARSHIP.
BUT THIS AIN'T NO TIME FER MY LIFE STORY. WHAT'S KEEPIN' THAT RUBBER-HEADED HUSBAND OF YOURS...?
RIGHT HERE, BEN. WE'VE COMPLETED OUR EXAMINATIONS OF THE SEVEN MEN WHO HAVE DIED. DOCTOR GRIMM WAS RIGHT ABOUT THE CAUSE OF DEATH. I'VE NEVER SEEN SUCH HORROR ON A HUMAN FACE.
AND YET YOU SAY THERE HAS BEEN NO UNUSUAL ACTIVITY IN THE TOWN, NO STRANGERS, NO PECULIAR ATMOSPHERIC OR GEOLOGICAL ACTIVITY, SHERIFF?
NOT A THING, MISTER FANTASTIC. I AIN'T SEEN NOTHIN' LIKE IT IN ALL MY LIFE. I JUS' DON'T GIT IT A'TALL.
JAKE, RUTH EFFORD IS HERE TO SEE YOU.
PRIVATE
TO SEE ALL YOUR REMARKABLE GUESTS, TOO, MY DEAR. IF SOMEONE HAS FINALLY COME TO INVESTIGATE THIS BUSINESS, I MEAN TO OFFER MY ASSISTANCE.
WOW!
RUTH EFFORD? NOT *DAME RUTH EFFORD?* THIS IS INDEED AN HONOR, MADAM. I READ YOUR TEXT ON OCCULT PRACTICES OF THE AUSTRALIAN ABORIGINES WITH GREAT INTEREST. IT'S THE DEFINITIVE WORK IN THE FIELD.
TISH TOSH. MERELY A DIVERSION, PROFESSOR RICHARDS. THE TIP OF THE ICEBERG. MY REAL INTEREST LIES HERE, WITH YOUR AMERICAN RED INDIANS. A SUPREMELY COMPLEX PEOPLE-- TRULY REMARKABLE.
BUT, WHAT BRINGS YOU TO BENSON? SURELY THERE WERE NO TRIBES HERE?
THAT'S WHAT I THOUGHT, REED, BUT RUTH'S LITTLE... ASSOCIATE THERE FOUND AN ARROWHEAD...
YES, THE DEAR CHILD-- WENDY IS HER NAME-- HAD READ ONE OF THE BOOKS I PREPARED FOR YOUNGER READERS, AND SENT ME HER FIND. I BELIEVED IT SIGNIFICANT ENOUGH TO GIVE UP MY SEAT AT CAMBRIDGE AND COME HERE.
IT IS MY OPINION SOME OF THE ARTIFACTS WE HAVE UNEARTHED HERE WOULD BE OF GREAT IMPORTANCE TO THIS CASE.
THEN I SUGGEST WE GO TO YOUR DIG AT ONCE.


TWENTY-FIVE MINUTES LATER, AT AN ARCHEOLOGICAL EXCAVATION OUTSIDE OF TOWN...
ISN'T IT FASCINATING? ALL THOSE LAYERS OF EARTH STRIPPED AWAY, AND EACH LAYER REPRESENTING ANOTHER AGE, ANOTHER TIME.
YEAH. GOTTA BE THE MOST EXCITING HOLE IN THE GROUND I EVER SAW, SUE...
THERE IT IS, PROFESSOR RICHARDS. YOU NOTICE THE EXTREME VARIFICATION OF STRATA AT THIS POINT. I BELIEVE THE ARROWHEAD WENDY FOUND DATES FROM THIS ERA.
THIS IS AMAZING. FROM WHAT I'VE READ, THIS WAS ALWAYS A BARREN AREA, YET YOUR FINDINGS SHOW STRUCTURES AND HABITATION EVEN BEFORE MAN WAS BELIEVED TO HAVE MIGRATED TO NORTH AMERICA.
AND LOOK AT THAT AREA OF DARK EARTH. A MASSIVE UPHEAVAL TOOK PLACE HERE SOME TEN THOUSAND YEARS AGO. THE LAND WAS... PURGED.
AND THE FIRST TWO DEATHS HAPPENED LESS THAN HALF A MILE FROM THIS DIG. INTERESTING...
WHAT'S THE MATTER, WENDY? YOU SEEM UPSET.
OH, I DON'T MEAN TO BE GLUM, MRS. RICHARDS. IT'S ONLY, WHEN I SENT THAT ARROWHEAD TO RUTH I DIDN'T THINK SHE'D COME HERE AND DIG THIS PLACE UP.
THIS HAS ALWAYS BEEN A SPECIAL PLACE--A NICE, FRIENDLY PLACE. WHEN MY MOM WAS SICK, WHEN SHE WAS DYING, I USED TO COME HERE AND LOOK FOR ROCKS AND STUFF.
IT'S LIKE ALL MY FRIENDS ARE HERE...
HEY, WENDY, YOU GOT BETTER FRIENDS THAN THAT.
WE'RE YOUR FRIENDS, AN' WITH PALS LIKE THE FANTASTIC FOUR YOU DON'T HAVE TA WORRY ABOUT NOTHIN'!
YOU REALLY MEAN THAT, MISTER THING?
HEY, LOOK AT THIS FACE, KID. WOULD THIS FACE LIE TO YOU?
OH--I HAVE SUCH WONDERFUL FRIENDS.

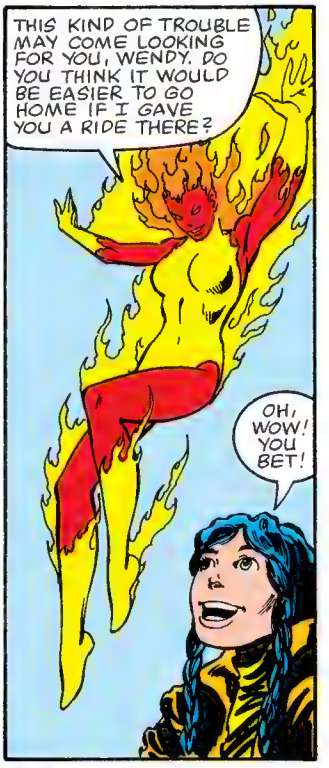
THE TIME IS SOME TWENTY HOURS LATER. NOT FAR FROM THE DIG, TWO OF RUTH EFFORD'S STUDENTS CROSS THE SHIFTING DUNES.
PLEASE, MIKE. LET'S GO BACK TO CAMP. I'M SCARED.
C'MON, CAROL, DON'T BE CHICKEN. I'M JUST A FEW HUNDRED YARDS OVER THAT WAY. IF I'M RIGHT, IT'S A DISCOVERY THAT'LL KNOCK THE OL' LADY RIGHT OUT OF HER DR. SCHOLLS.
THAT'S FUNNY... IT'S COLD IN THE DESERT AT NIGHT, BUT I'VE NEVER KNOWN IT TO BE THIS COLD.
IT CAME UP ALL OF A SUDDEN, MIKE, IT ISN'T NATURAL! PLEASE ... NOW WILL YOU COME BACK TO CAMP?
BEFORE MIKE CAMPBELL CAN REPLY...
LOOK... THAT MIST... WHERE'S IT COMING FROM...?
THERE'S NO FOG ON THE DESERT, IS THERE...?
IT'S MOVING SO QUICKLY --AND WHAT ARE THOSE SHADOWS?
IT'S AS IF THERE'S SOMETHING ALIVE IN THERE -- SOMETHING THAT MOVES...
CAROL! LOOK! WHAT ARE THEY?
MIKE!
MIKE!
THEIR SCREAMS ARE QUICKLY SWALLOWED BY THE DESERT.

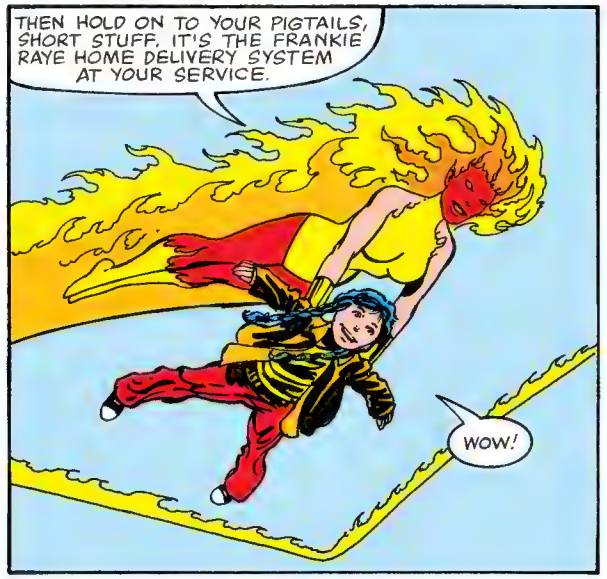

NOT QUITE MEANWHILE...
HALF A WORLD AWAY A SOUND LIKE DISTANT THUNDER ROLLS ACROSS THE DEEPEST HIMALAYAS.
IT IS THE SOUND OF WAR...
AND AT THE VERY HEART OF THAT WAR A BATTLE OF ANOTHER SORT IS BEING FOUGHT...
LIE STILL, MY CHILD. THERE IS NOTHING MORE WE CAN DO FOR YOU, SAVE PRAY.
P-PIETRO...
AND, ALMOST AS IF THE WORLD'S FASTEST HUMAN MIGHT HAVE HEARD THE FAINT CALLING OF HIS TRUE NAME...
PHYSICIAN, HOW FARES MY WIFE?
AS WELL AS CAN BE HOPED, QUICK-SILVER.
ACROSS THE WORLD THE MUTANT, FORMER AVENGER IS KNOWN FOR HIS TEMPER AND BRASH SPIRIT.
WHO THEN COULD BE BLAMED FOR A MOMENTARY FAILURE TO RECOGNIZE THE SILVER-HAIRED YOUTH WHO KNEELS SO TENDERLY AT HIS WIFE'S SIDE?
P-PIETRO... BELOVED. YOU ARE INJURED? THE WAR DOES NOT GO WELL?
WE NEITHER WIN NOR LOSE, MY DARLING. DO NOT CONCERN YOURSELF.
DOCTOR?
OF THE CHILD I CAN SAY VERY LITTLE. THE COMBINATION OF YOUR MUTANT GENES WITH THOSE OF YOUR WIFE... THOSE OF AN INHUMAN... I DO NOT KNOW. AT BEST THE BIRTH WILL NOT BE AN EASY ONE.
THIS IS OF COURSE MADE ALL THE WORSE BY THE FACT THAT YOUR WIFE IS SUFFERING FROM THAT SAME ILLNESS WHICH HAS LATELY STRICKEN ALL HERE IN ATTILAN.
NOT ALL, PHYSICIAN. I AM NOT INFECTED.
THEN TO YOU FALLS THE ROLE OF SAVIOR QUICKSILVER. IT IS YOU WHO MUST NOW LEAVE THE HIDDEN LAND...
"IT IS YOU WHO MUST SAVE US..."
"I SHALL," SAYS QUICKSILVER. "I MUST!"

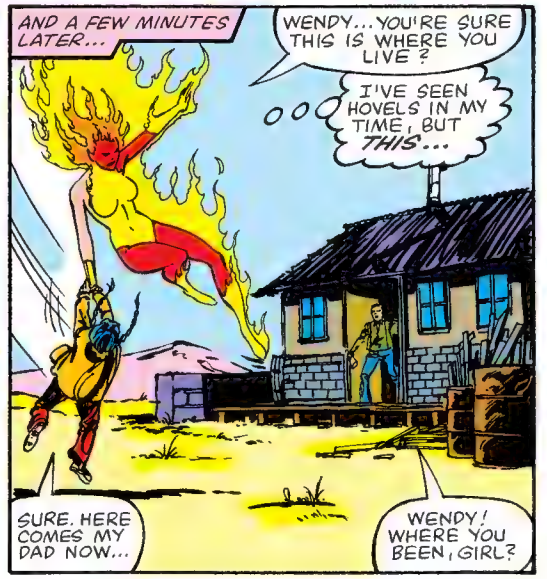

BENSON, ARIZONA. LATE MORNING OF THE FOLLOWING DAY...
I CAN'T BELIEVE THEY'RE DEAD, JOHNNY. THEY WERE JUST KIDS, A COUPLE OF YEARS YOUNGER THAN US.
IF THEY'D BEEN TWO HUNDRED EACH THEY'D BE JUST AS DEAD, FRANKIE. WHAT TROUBLES ME IS THE LOOKS ON THEIR FACES. I DIDN'T THINK ANYTHING COULD LOOK THAT SCARED.
AMBULANCE

THAT BRINGS THE MORTALITY LIST UP TO NINE, REED. NINE PEOPLE LITERALLY FRIGHTENED TO DEATH.
THERE'S NOTHING REGISTERING ON MY SENSOR. THAT DOESN'T SURPRISE ME, I'M AFRAID. THEY'D BOTH BEEN DEAD FOR SEVERAL HOURS.
AND YET, JUST LIKE THE OTHERS, THERE'S NO SIGN OF VIOLENCE, NO INDICATION THAT THERE WAS ANYTHING BUT THE TWO OF THEM HERE.

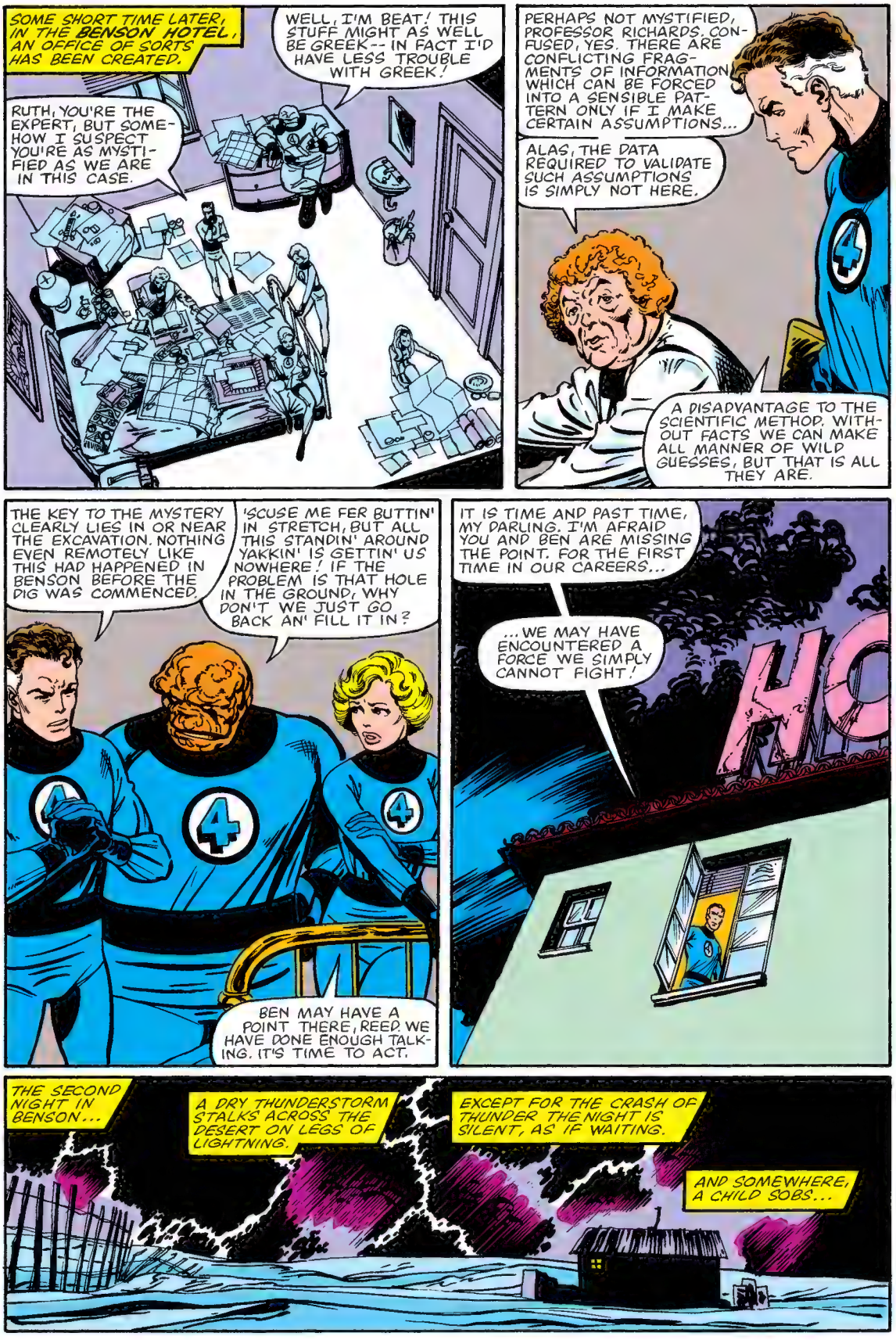
EVEN IF THERE WERE ANY UNUSUAL FORCES AT WORK THE ENERGIES MAY WELL HAVE DISSIPATED... EVEN ASSUMING THERE WAS ACTUALLY SOMETHING THAT WOULD REGISTER ON THE SCANNER.
AND I THINK IT'S TIME FOR YOU TO GET BACK HOME, WENDY. WE HAVE NO IDEA WHAT WE ARE DEALING WITH. I HAVE NO DESIRE TO SEE YOU IN DANGER.
I THINK I'D BETTER SEE ABOUT SETTING UP SOME MORE SOPHISTICATED ALARMS.
AW, GEE, RUTH, DO I HAFTA GO? I'LL STAY OUT OF TROUBLE-- HONEST!


THIS KIND OF TROUBLE MAY COME LOOKING FOR YOU, WENDY. DO YOU THINK IT WOULD BE EASIER TO GO HOME IF I GAVE YOU A RIDE THERE?
OH, WOW! YOU BET!

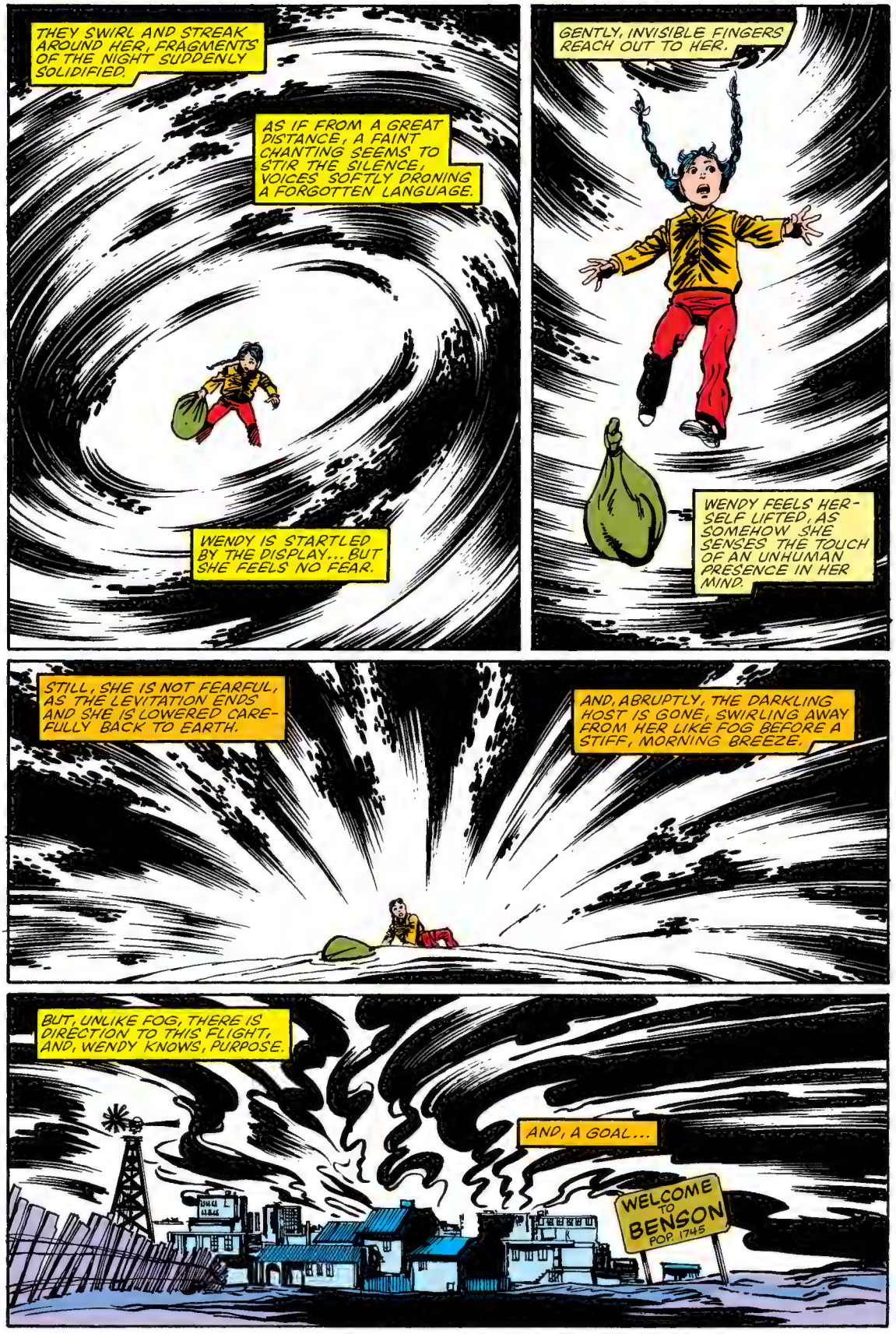

THEN HOLD ON TO YOUR PIGTAILS, SHORT STUFF. IT'S THE FRANKIE RAYE HOME DELIVERY SYSTEM AT YOUR SERVICE.
WOW!

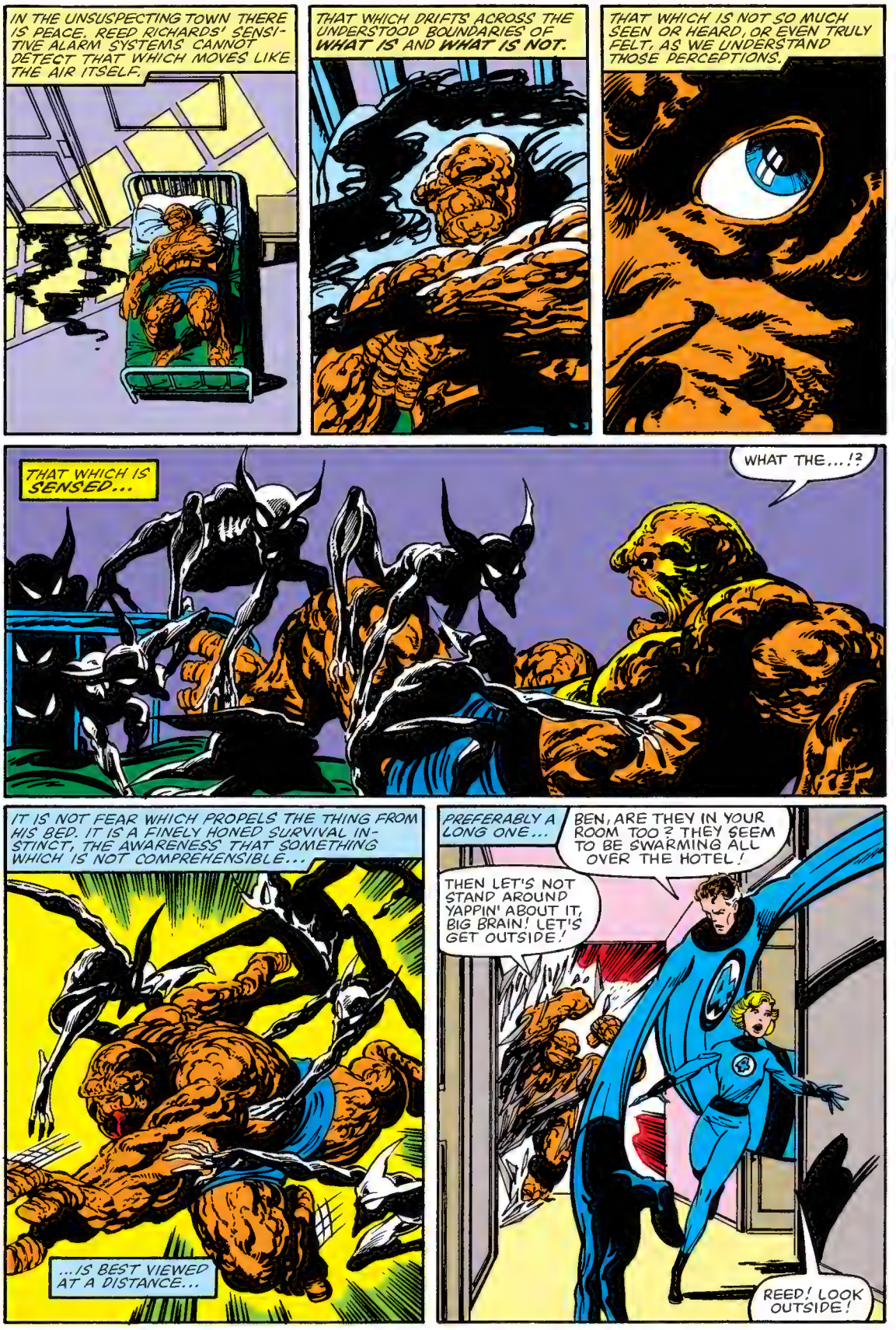

AND A FEW MINUTES LATER...
WENDY... YOU'RE SURE THIS IS WHERE YOU LIVE?
I'VE SEEN HOVELS IN MY TIME, BUT THIS...
SURE. HERE COMES MY DAD NOW...
WENDY! WHERE YOU BEEN, GIRL?

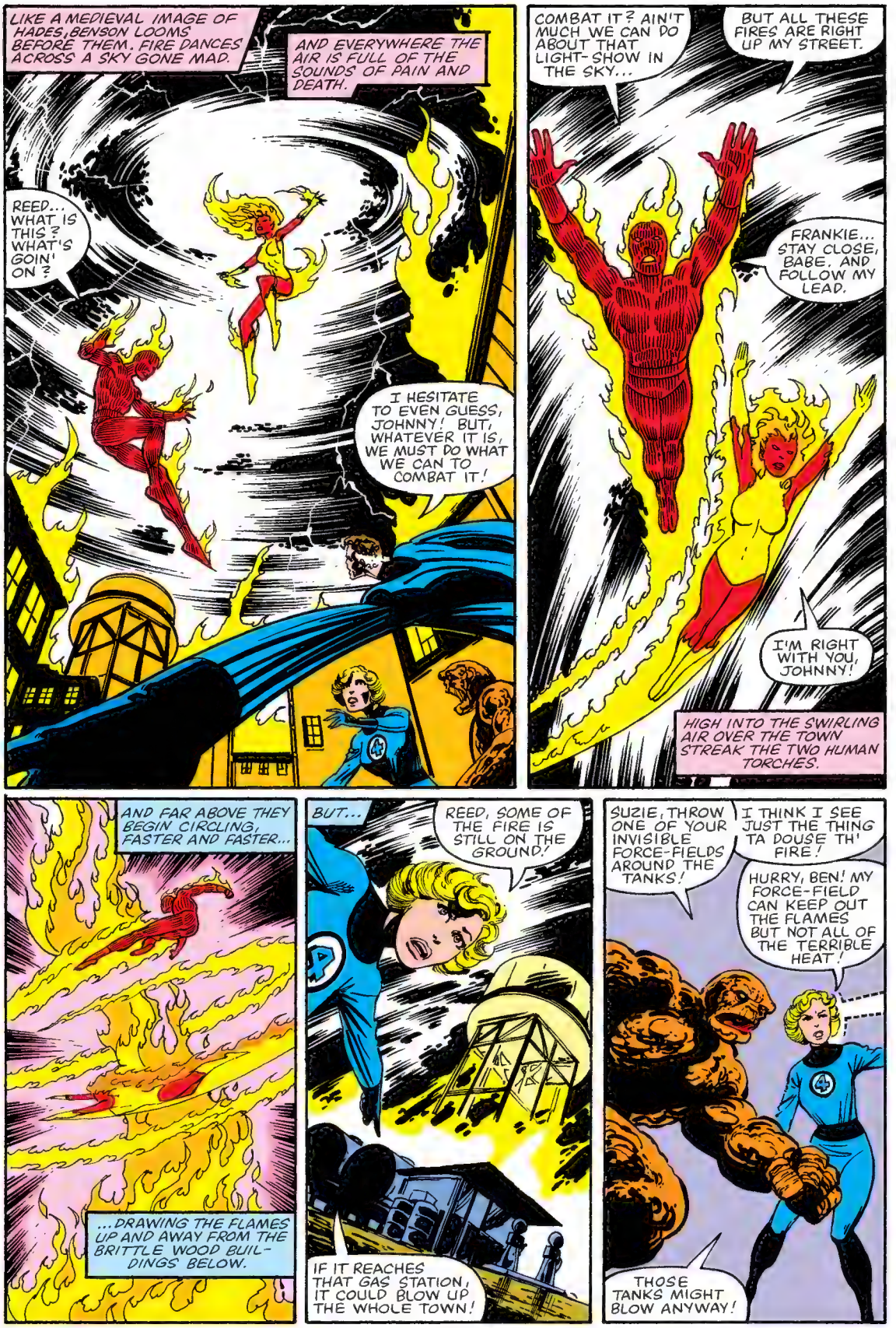
I LEFT YOU A NOTE, DADDY. YOU WERE STILL ASLEEP WHEN I WENT OUT. I'VE BEEN HELPING RUTH AND THE FANTASTIC FOUR TRY TO FIGURE OUT WHAT'S BEEN HAPPENING TO THOSE...
NEVER MIND THAT! YOU GET YOURSELF INSIDE! I TOLD YOU LAST NIGHT TO CLEAN UP BEFORE YOU WENT OUT!
BUT, I DID THAT, DADDY. I CLEANED EVERYWHERE BUT ON YOUR BED. I COULDN'T DO THAT BECAUSE YOU WERE SLEEPING!
DON'T YOU MOUTH OFF AT ME, YOU LITTLE BRAT!
WENDY!
WHAP!
DADDY! PLEASE, DON'T...
WHY, YOU MISERABLE WORM!!
HEY! WHAT...?!
YOU CRAWLING PIECE OF GARBAGE! THERE ARE LAWS AGAINST CHILD ABUSE! I OUGHT TO ROAST YOU WHERE YOU STAND!
HEY... I DIDN'T MEAN NOTHIN'! WHO--WHAT ARE YOU?
FRANKIE! NO, PLEASE! DON'T HURT HIM! DON'T HURT MY FATHER!
WENDY... ARE YOU SURE YOU'LL BE ALL RIGHT ALONE WITH HIM? DOES HE HIT YOU LIKE THAT OFTEN?
I'M OKAY. HE DOESN'T HURT ME EXCEPT SOMETIMES WHEN HE'S HAD TOO MUCH TO DRINK. HE'S NOT A BAD MAN, FRANKIE. HONEST.
AND... HE WAS RIGHT. I SHOULD HAVE FINISHED MY CHORES BEFORE I WENT OUT.
THAT SOUNDED SUSPICIOUSLY WELL-REHEARSED. I'VE GOT A FEELING THIS HAS HAPPENED BEFORE.
NOTHING I CAN DO ABOUT IT RIGHT NOW, BUT...
ALRIGHT, WENDY. BUT YOU KEEP YOUR HANDS TO YOURSELF, MISTER--OR ELSE!
'BYE!

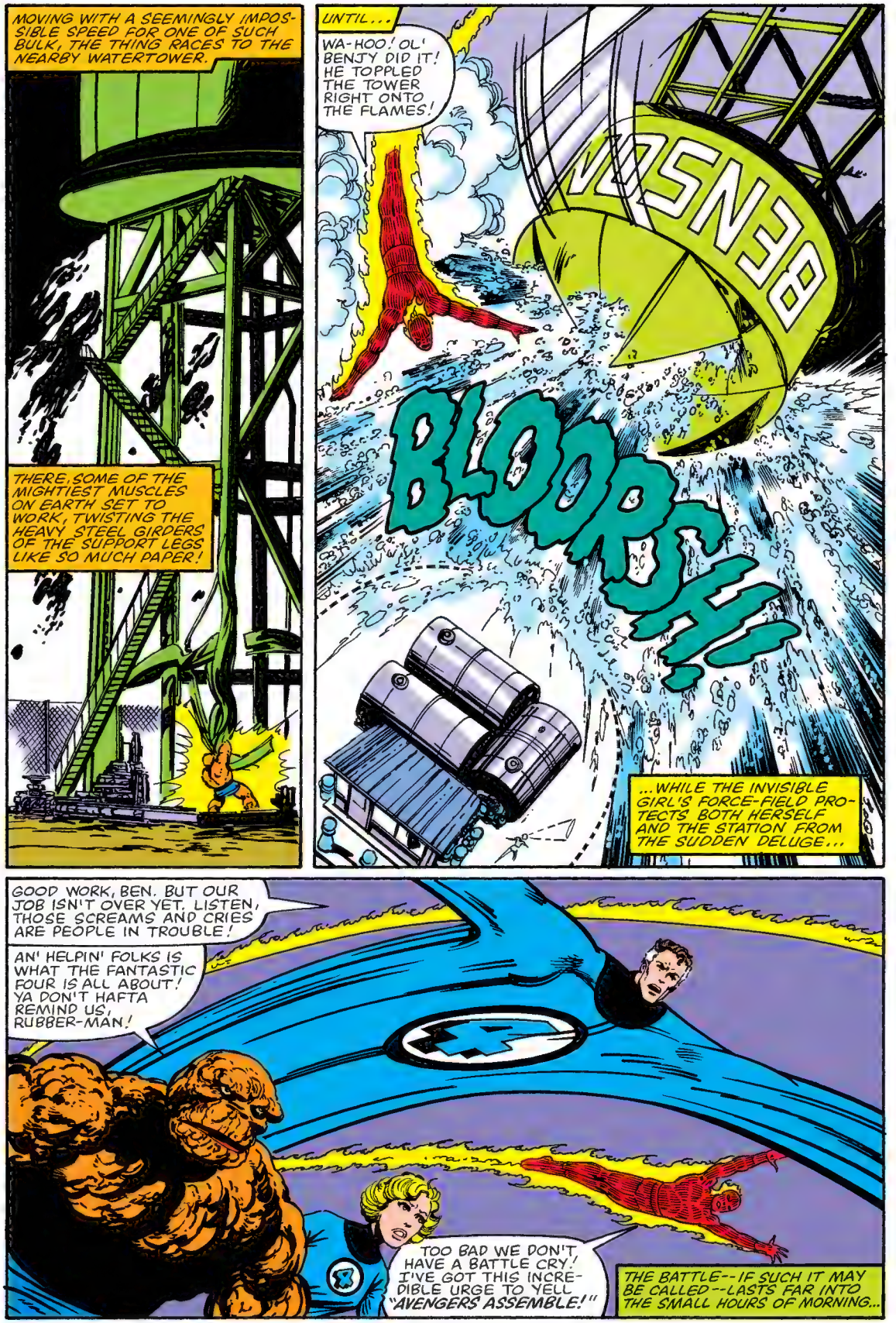

SOME SHORT TIME LATER, IN THE BENSON HOTEL, AN OFFICE OF SORTS HAS BEEN CREATED.
WELL, I'M BEAT! THIS STUFF MIGHT AS WELL BE GREEK -- IN FACT I'D HAVE LESS TROUBLE WITH GREEK!
RUTH, YOU'RE THE EXPERT, BUT SOMEHOW I SUSPECT YOU'RE AS MYSTIFIED AS WE ARE IN THIS CASE.
PERHAPS NOT MYSTIFIED, PROFESSOR RICHARDS. CONFUSED, YES. THERE ARE CONFLICTING FRAGMENTS OF INFORMATION WHICH CAN BE FORCED INTO A SENSIBLE PATTERN ONLY IF I MAKE CERTAIN ASSUMPTIONS...
ALAS, THE DATA REQUIRED TO VALIDATE SUCH ASSUMPTIONS IS SIMPLY NOT HERE.
A DISADVANTAGE TO THE SCIENTIFIC METHOD. WITHOUT FACTS WE CAN MAKE ALL MANNER OF WILD GUESSES, BUT THAT IS ALL THEY ARE.
THE KEY TO THE MYSTERY CLEARLY LIES IN OR NEAR THE EXCAVATION. NOTHING EVEN REMOTELY LIKE THIS HAD HAPPENED IN BENSON BEFORE THE DIG WAS COMMENCED.
'SCUSE ME FER BUTTIN' IN STRETCH, BUT ALL THIS STANDIN' AROUND YAKKIN' IS GETTIN' US NOWHERE! IF THE PROBLEM IS THAT HOLE IN THE GROUND, WHY DON'T WE JUST GO BACK AN' FILL IT IN?
BEN MAY HAVE A POINT THERE, REED. WE HAVE DONE ENOUGH TALKING. IT'S TIME TO ACT.
IT IS TIME AND PAST TIME, MY DARLING. I'M AFRAID YOU AND BEN ARE MISSING THE POINT. FOR THE FIRST TIME IN OUR CAREERS...
...WE MAY HAVE ENCOUNTERED A FORCE WE SIMPLY CANNOT FIGHT!
THE SECOND NIGHT IN BENSON...
A DRY THUNDERSTORM STALKS ACROSS THE DESERT ON LEGS OF LIGHTNING.
EXCEPT FOR THE CRASH OF THUNDER THE NIGHT IS SILENT, AS IF WAITING.
AND SOMEWHERE, A CHILD SOBS...

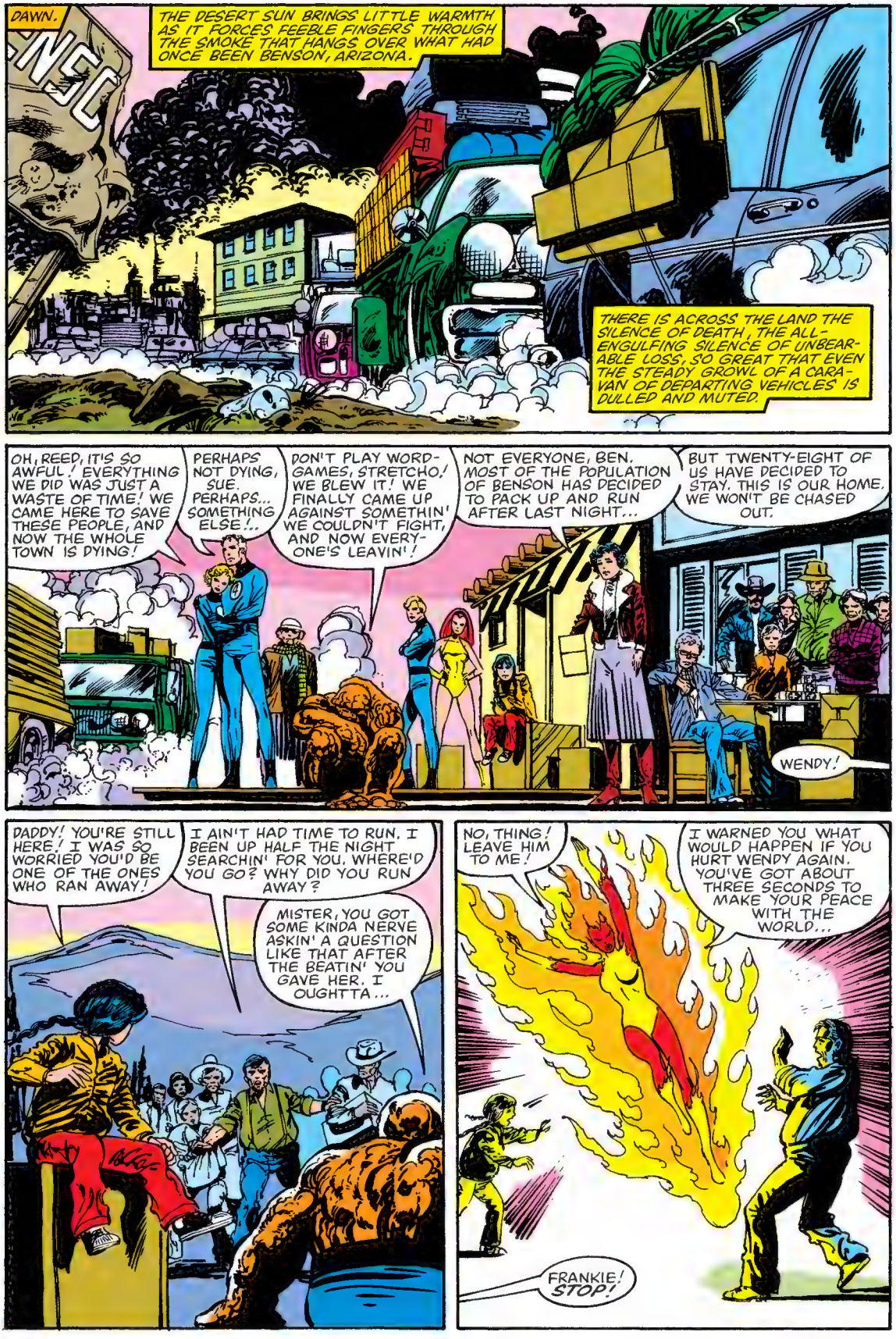
HER SOBS COME IN SHORT, SHARP GASPS. IT HURTS HER TO BREATHE TOO DEEPLY.
WENDY HAD NEVER SEEN HER FATHER SO DRUNK, OR SO ANGRY. HE HAS BEATEN HER BEFORE, BUT NEVER LIKE THIS.
SHE ACHES.
AND SHE DECIDES.
WITH THE INNOCENCE OF A CHILD, SHE HAS ALWAYS LOVED HER FATHER, NO MATTER HOW MUCH PAIN THAT LOVE MIGHT HAVE COST HER.
NOW SHE REALIZES THERE IS A DISTINCT DANGER UNLESS SHE GETS HELP.
SHE HAS LEARNED MUCH STEALTH IN HER EIGHT YEARS, HIDING FROM HER FATHER'S RAGES.
HER DEPARTURE DOES NOT DISTURB HIS STUPOR.
A SMALL, FRIGHTENED DESERT CREATURE, SHE MOVES QUICKLY ACROSS THE COOL SANDS.
SHE HAS NOT WANTED TO GO TO HER VERY SPECIAL FRIENDS BEFORE.
NOW SHE KNOWS SHE MUST.
BUT SHE HAS NOT GONE FAR TOWARDS THE ARCHEOLOGICAL DIG BEFORE THE DESERT STIRS...
THE MISTS RISE...
AND SUDDENLY, THEY ARE HERE...

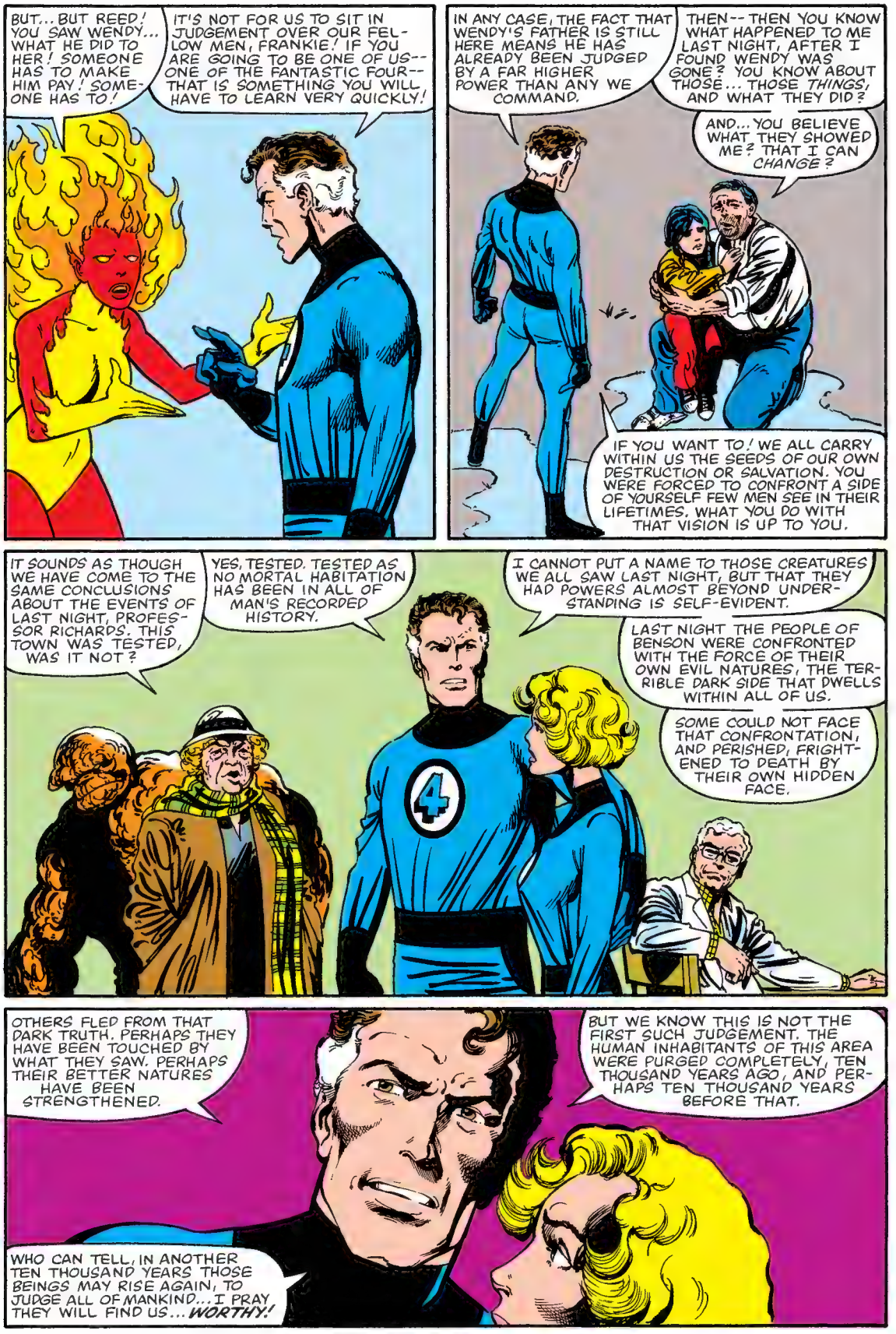

THEY SWIRL AND STREAK AROUND HER, FRAGMENTS OF THE NIGHT SUDDENLY SOLIDIFIED.
AS IF FROM A GREAT DISTANCE, A FAINT CHANTING SEEMS TO STIR THE SILENCE, VOICES SOFTLY DRONING A FORGOTTEN LANGUAGE.
WENDY IS STARTLED BY THE DISPLAY... BUT SHE FEELS NO FEAR.
GENTLY, INVISIBLE FINGERS REACH OUT TO HER.
WENDY FEELS HERSELF LIFTED, AS SOMEHOW SHE SENSES THE TOUCH OF AN UNHUMAN PRESENCE IN HER MIND.
STILL, SHE IS NOT FEARFUL, AS THE LEVITATION ENDS AND SHE IS LOWERED CAREFULLY BACK TO EARTH.
AND, ABRUPTLY, THE DARKLING HOST IS GONE, SWIRLING AWAY FROM HER LIKE FOG BEFORE A STIFF, MORNING BREEZE.
BUT, UNLIKE FOG, THERE IS DIRECTION TO THIS FLIGHT, AND, WENDY KNOWS, PURPOSE.
AND, A GOAL...
WELCOME TO BENSON POP. 1745

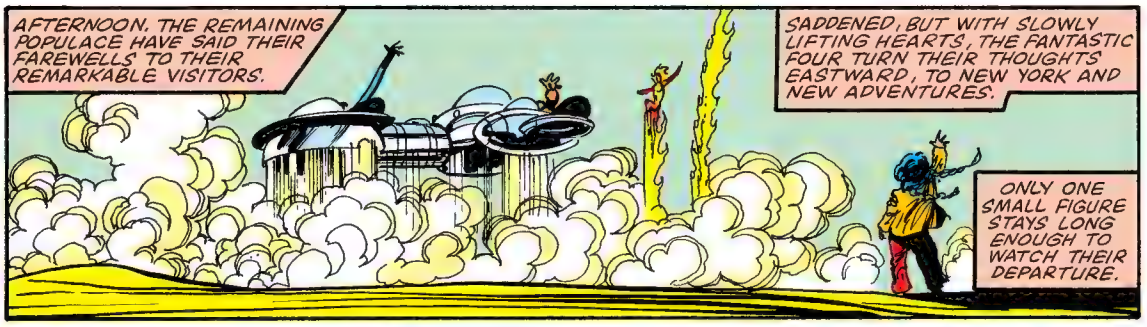

IN THE UNSUSPECTING TOWN THERE IS PEACE. REED RICHARDS' SENSITIVE ALARM SYSTEMS CANNOT DETECT THAT WHICH MOVES LIKE THE AIR ITSELF.
THAT WHICH DRIFTS ACROSS THE UNDERSTOOD BOUNDARIES OF WHAT IS AND WHAT IS NOT.
THAT WHICH IS NOT SO MUCH SEEN OR HEARD, OR EVEN TRULY FELT, AS WE UNDERSTAND THOSE PERCEPTIONS.
THAT WHICH IS SENSED...
WHAT THE...!?
IT IS NOT FEAR WHICH PROPELS THE THING FROM HIS BED. IT IS A FINELY HONED SURVIVAL INSTINCT, THE AWARENESS THAT SOMETHING WHICH IS NOT COMPREHENSIBLE...
...IS BEST VIEWED AT A DISTANCE...
PREFERABLY A LONG ONE...
BEN, ARE THEY IN YOUR ROOM TOO? THEY SEEM TO BE SWARMING ALL OVER THE HOTEL!
THEN LET'S NOT STAND AROUND YAPPIN' ABOUT IT, BIG BRAIN! LET'S GET OUTSIDE!
REED! LOOK OUTSIDE!

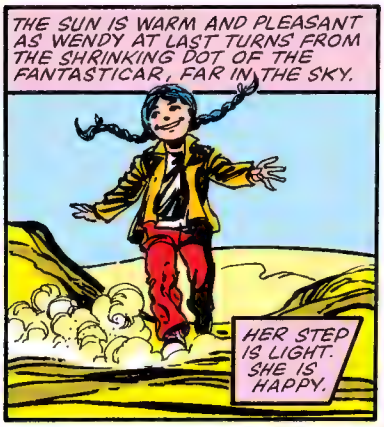

LIKE A MEDIEVAL IMAGE OF HADES, BENSON LOOMS BEFORE THEM. FIRE DANCES ACROSS A SKY GONE MAD.
AND EVERYWHERE THE AIR IS FULL OF THE SOUNDS OF PAIN AND DEATH.
REED... WHAT IS THIS? WHAT'S GOIN' ON?
I HESITATE TO EVEN GUESS, JOHNNY! BUT, WHATEVER IT IS, WE MUST DO WHAT WE CAN TO COMBAT IT!
COMBAT IT? AIN'T MUCH WE CAN DO ABOUT THAT LIGHT-SHOW IN THE SKY...
BUT ALL THESE FIRES ARE RIGHT UP MY STREET.
FRANKIE... STAY CLOSE, BABE, AND FOLLOW MY LEAD.
I'M RIGHT WITH YOU, JOHNNY!
HIGH INTO THE SWIRLING AIR OVER THE TOWN STREAK THE TWO HUMAN TORCHES.
AND FAR ABOVE THEY BEGIN CIRCLING, FASTER AND FASTER...
...DRAWING THE FLAMES UP AND AWAY FROM THE BRITTLE WOOD BUILDINGS BELOW.
BUT...
REED, SOME OF THE FIRE IS STILL ON THE GROUND!
IF IT REACHES THAT GAS STATION, IT COULD BLOW UP THE WHOLE TOWN!
SUZIE, THROW ONE OF YOUR INVISIBLE FORCE-FIELDS AROUND THE TANKS!
I THINK I SEE JUST THE THING TA DOUSE TH' FIRE!
HURRY, BEN! MY FORCE-FIELD CAN KEEP OUT THE FLAMES BUT NOT ALL OF THE TERRIBLE HEAT!
THOSE TANKS MIGHT BLOW ANYWAY!

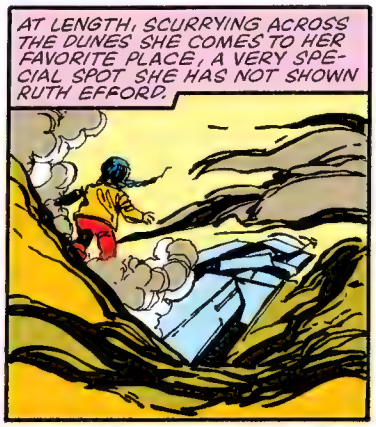

MOVING WITH A SEEMINGLY IMPOSSIBLE SPEED FOR ONE OF SUCH BULK, THE THING RACES TO THE NEARBY WATERTOWER.
THERE, SOME OF THE MIGHTIEST MUSCLES ON EARTH SET TO WORK, TWISTING THE HEAVY STEEL GIRDERS OF THE SUPPORT LEGS LIKE SO MUCH PAPER!
UNTIL...
WA-HOO! OL' BENJY DID IT! HE TOPPLED THE TOWER RIGHT ONTO THE FLAMES!
BLOOOSH!
...WHILE THE INVISIBLE GIRL'S FORCE-FIELD PROTECTS BOTH HERSELF AND THE STATION FROM THE SUDDEN DELUGE...
GOOD WORK, BEN. BUT OUR JOB ISN'T OVER YET. LISTEN, THOSE SCREAMS AND CRIES ARE PEOPLE IN TROUBLE!
AN' HELPIN' FOLKS IS WHAT THE FANTASTIC FOUR IS ALL ABOUT! YA DON'T HAFTA REMIND US, RUBBER-MAN!
TOO BAD WE DON'T HAVE A BATTLE CRY! I'VE GOT THIS INCREDIBLE URGE TO YELL "AVENGERS ASSEMBLE!"
THE BATTLE--IF SUCH IT MAY BE CALLED--LASTS FAR INTO THE SMALL HOURS OF MORNING...

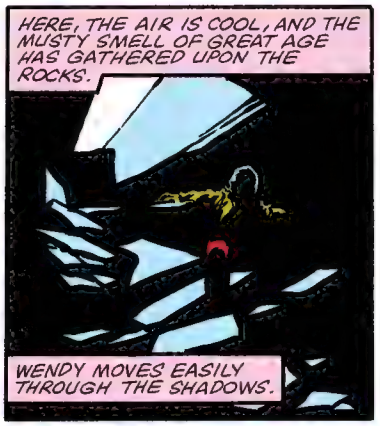

DAWN.
THE DESERT SUN BRINGS LITTLE WARMTH AS IT FORCES FEEBLE FINGERS THROUGH THE SMOKE THAT HANGS OVER WHAT HAD ONCE BEEN BENSON, ARIZONA.
THERE IS ACROSS THE LAND THE SILENCE OF DEATH, THE ALL-ENGULFING SILENCE OF UNBEARABLE LOSS, SO GREAT THAT EVEN THE STEADY GROWL OF A CARAVAN OF DEPARTING VEHICLES IS DULLED AND MUTED.
OH, REED, IT'S SO AWFUL! EVERYTHING WE DID WAS JUST A WASTE OF TIME! WE CAME HERE TO SAVE THESE PEOPLE, AND NOW THE WHOLE TOWN IS DYING!
PERHAPS NOT DYING, SUE. PERHAPS... SOMETHING ELSE!..
DON'T PLAY WORD-GAMES, STRETCHO! WE BLEW IT! WE FINALLY CAME UP AGAINST SOMETHIN' WE COULDN'T FIGHT, AND NOW EVERYONE'S LEAVIN'!
NOT EVERYONE, BEN. MOST OF THE POPULATION OF BENSON HAS DECIDED TO PACK UP AND RUN AFTER LAST NIGHT...
BUT TWENTY-EIGHT OF US HAVE DECIDED TO STAY. THIS IS OUR HOME. WE WON'T BE CHASED OUT.
WENDY!
DADDY! YOU'RE STILL HERE! I WAS SO WORRIED YOU'D BE ONE OF THE ONES WHO RAN AWAY!
I AIN'T HAD TIME TO RUN. I BEEN UP HALF THE NIGHT SEARCHIN' FOR YOU. WHERE'D YOU GO? WHY DID YOU RUN AWAY?
MISTER, YOU GOT SOME KINDA NERVE ASKIN' A QUESTION LIKE THAT AFTER THE BEATIN' YOU GAVE HER. I OUGHTTA...
NO, THING! LEAVE HIM TO ME!
I WARNED YOU WHAT WOULD HAPPEN IF YOU HURT WENDY AGAIN. YOU'VE GOT ABOUT THREE SECONDS TO MAKE YOUR PEACE WITH THE WORLD...
FRANKIE! STOP!

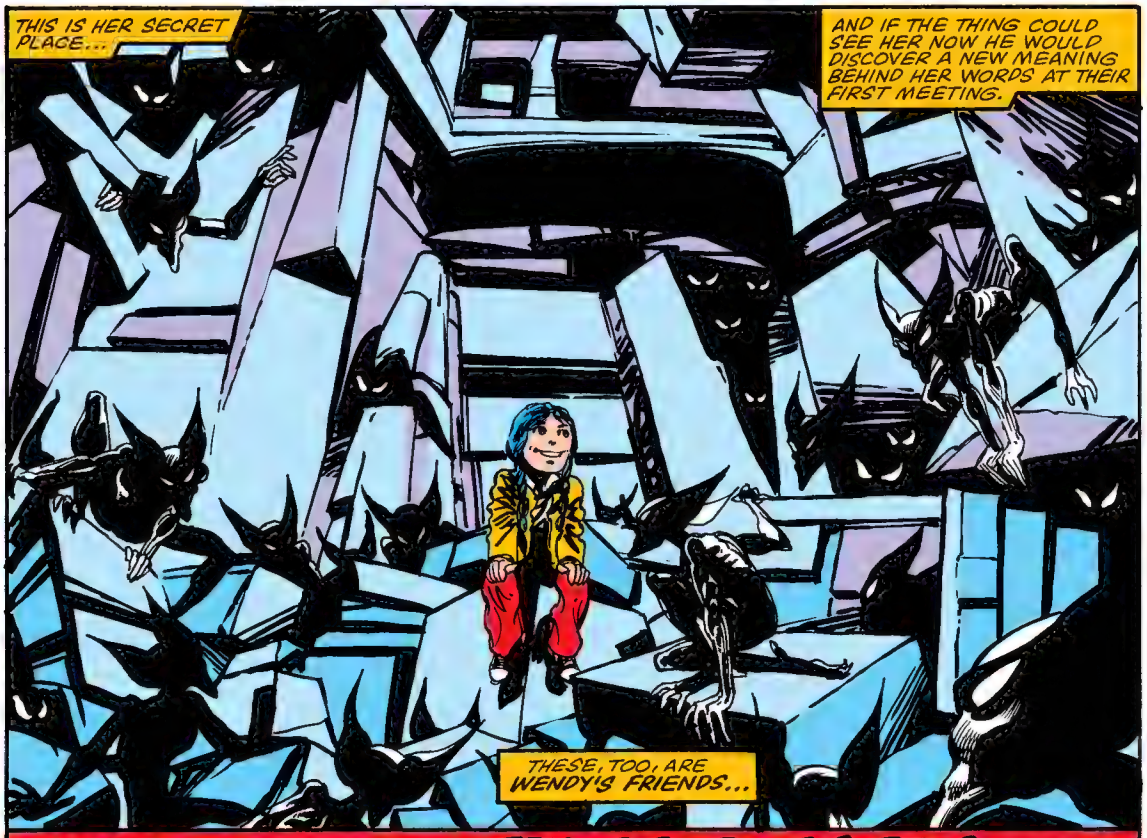

BUT... BUT REED! YOU SAW WENDY... WHAT HE DID TO HER! SOMEONE HAS TO MAKE HIM PAY! SOMEONE HAS TO!
IT'S NOT FOR US TO SIT IN JUDGEMENT OVER OUR FELLOW MEN, FRANKIE! IF YOU ARE GOING TO BE ONE OF US--ONE OF THE FANTASTIC FOUR--THAT IS SOMETHING YOU WILL HAVE TO LEARN VERY QUICKLY!
IN ANY CASE, THE FACT THAT WENDY'S FATHER IS STILL HERE MEANS HE HAS ALREADY BEEN JUDGED BY A FAR HIGHER POWER THAN ANY WE COMMAND.
THEN-- THEN YOU KNOW WHAT HAPPENED TO ME LAST NIGHT, AFTER I FOUND WENDY WAS GONE? YOU KNOW ABOUT THOSE... THOSE THINGS, AND WHAT THEY DID?
AND... YOU BELIEVE WHAT THEY SHOWED ME? THAT I CAN CHANGE?
IF YOU WANT TO! WE ALL CARRY WITHIN US THE SEEDS OF OUR OWN DESTRUCTION OR SALVATION. YOU WERE FORCED TO CONFRONT A SIDE OF YOURSELF FEW MEN SEE IN THEIR LIFETIMES. WHAT YOU DO WITH THAT VISION IS UP TO YOU.
IT SOUNDS AS THOUGH WE HAVE COME TO THE SAME CONCLUSIONS ABOUT THE EVENTS OF LAST NIGHT, PROFESSOR RICHARDS. THIS TOWN WAS TESTED, WAS IT NOT?
YES, TESTED. TESTED AS NO MORTAL HABITATION HAS BEEN IN ALL OF MAN'S RECORDED HISTORY.
I CANNOT PUT A NAME TO THOSE CREATURES WE ALL SAW LAST NIGHT, BUT THAT THEY HAD POWERS ALMOST BEYOND UNDERSTANDING IS SELF-EVIDENT.
LAST NIGHT THE PEOPLE OF BENSON WERE CONFRONTED WITH THE FORCE OF THEIR OWN EVIL NATURES, THE TERRIBLE DARK SIDE THAT DWELLS WITHIN ALL OF US.
SOME COULD NOT FACE THAT CONFRONTATION, AND PERISHED, FRIGHTENED TO DEATH BY THEIR OWN HIDDEN FACE.
OTHERS FLED FROM THAT DARK TRUTH. PERHAPS THEY HAVE BEEN TOUCHED BY WHAT THEY SAW. PERHAPS THEIR BETTER NATURES HAVE BEEN STRENGTHENED.
BUT WE KNOW THIS IS NOT THE FIRST SUCH JUDGEMENT. THE HUMAN INHABITANTS OF THIS AREA WERE PURGED COMPLETELY, TEN THOUSAND YEARS AGO, AND PERHAPS TEN THOUSAND YEARS BEFORE THAT.
WHO CAN TELL, IN ANOTHER TEN THOUSAND YEARS THOSE BEINGS MAY RISE AGAIN, TO JUDGE ALL OF MANKIND... I PRAY THEY WILL FIND US... WORTHY!


AFTERNOON. THE REMAINING POPULACE HAVE SAID THEIR FAREWELLS TO THEIR REMARKABLE VISITORS.
SADDENED, BUT WITH SLOWLY LIFTING HEARTS, THE FANTASTIC FOUR TURN THEIR THOUGHTS EASTWARD, TO NEW YORK AND NEW ADVENTURES.
ONLY ONE SMALL FIGURE STAYS LONG ENOUGH TO WATCH THEIR DEPARTURE.


THE SUN IS WARM AND PLEASANT AS WENDY AT LAST TURNS FROM THE SHRINKING DOT OF THE FANTASTICAR, FAR IN THE SKY.
HER STEP IS LIGHT. SHE IS HAPPY.


AT LENGTH, SCURRYING ACROSS THE DUNES SHE COMES TO HER FAVORITE PLACE, A VERY SPECIAL SPOT SHE HAS NOT SHOWN RUTH EFFORD.


HERE, THE AIR IS COOL, AND THE MUSTY SMELL OF GREAT AGE HAS GATHERED UPON THE ROCKS.
WENDY MOVES EASILY THROUGH THE SHADOWS.


THIS IS HER SECRET PLACE...
AND IF THE THING COULD SEE HER NOW HE WOULD DISCOVER A NEW MEANING BEHIND HER WORDS AT THEIR FIRST MEETING.
THESE, TOO, ARE WENDY'S FRIENDS...

NEXT ISSUE:
THE AMAZING INHUMANS! THE FATE OF MEDUSA! THE BIRTH OF CRYSTAL AND QUICKSILVER'S CHILD! ALL THIS AND MUCH, MUCH MORE NEXT MONTH IN...
EXODUS!
BE HERE, TRUE BELIEVER!

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THE WORLD'S GREATEST COMIC MAGAZINE!
Fantastic Four
"EXODUS!"
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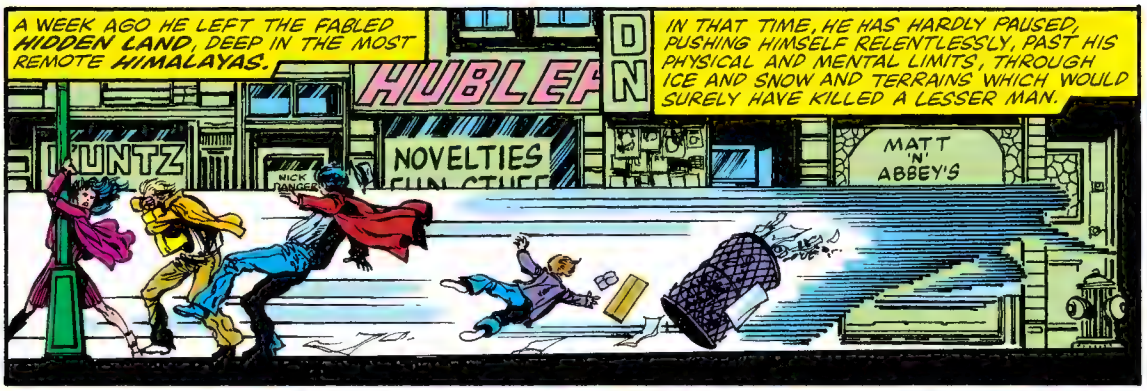
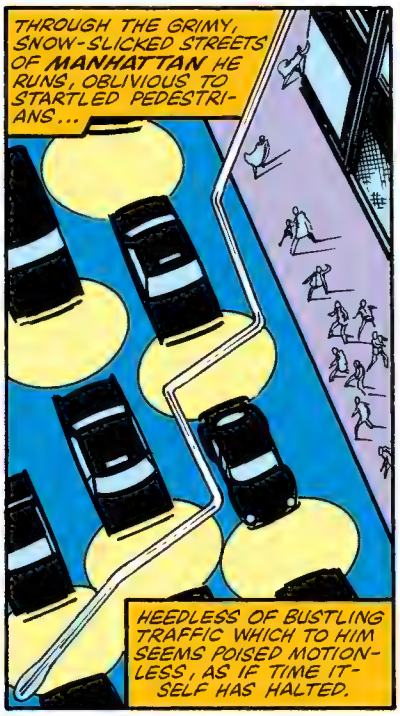
BRUCE AUSTIN
STARRING THE INCOMPARABLE
INHUMANS!
PLUS: THE RETURN OF MEDUSA AND THE BIRTH OF QUICKSILVER AND CRYSTAL'S CHILD!

Reed Richards! Ben Grimm! Sue Richards! Johnny Storm! Together they braved the unknown terrors of outer space and were changed into something more than human! MR. FANTASTIC! THE THING! THE INVISIBLE GIRL! THE HUMAN TORCH! And now the world will never again be the same!

Stan Lee PRESENTS: THE FANTASTIC FOUR!®

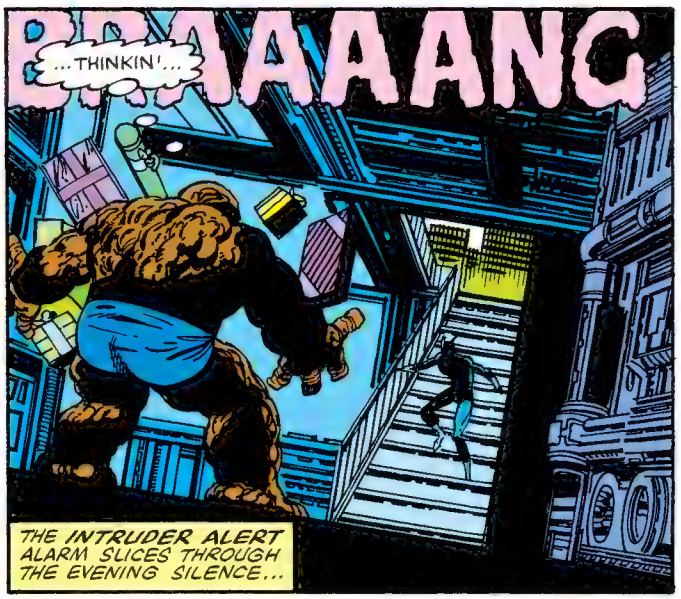

A WEEK AGO HE LEFT THE FABLED HIDDEN LAND, DEEP IN THE MOST REMOTE HIMALAYAS.
IN THAT TIME, HE HAS HARDLY PAUSED, PUSHING HIMSELF RELENTLESSLY, PAST HIS PHYSICAL AND MENTAL LIMITS, THROUGH ICE AND SNOW AND TERRAINS WHICH WOULD SURELY HAVE KILLED A LESSER MAN.
HUBLEY
DN
KUNTZ
NOVELTIES
MATT 'N' ABBEY'S

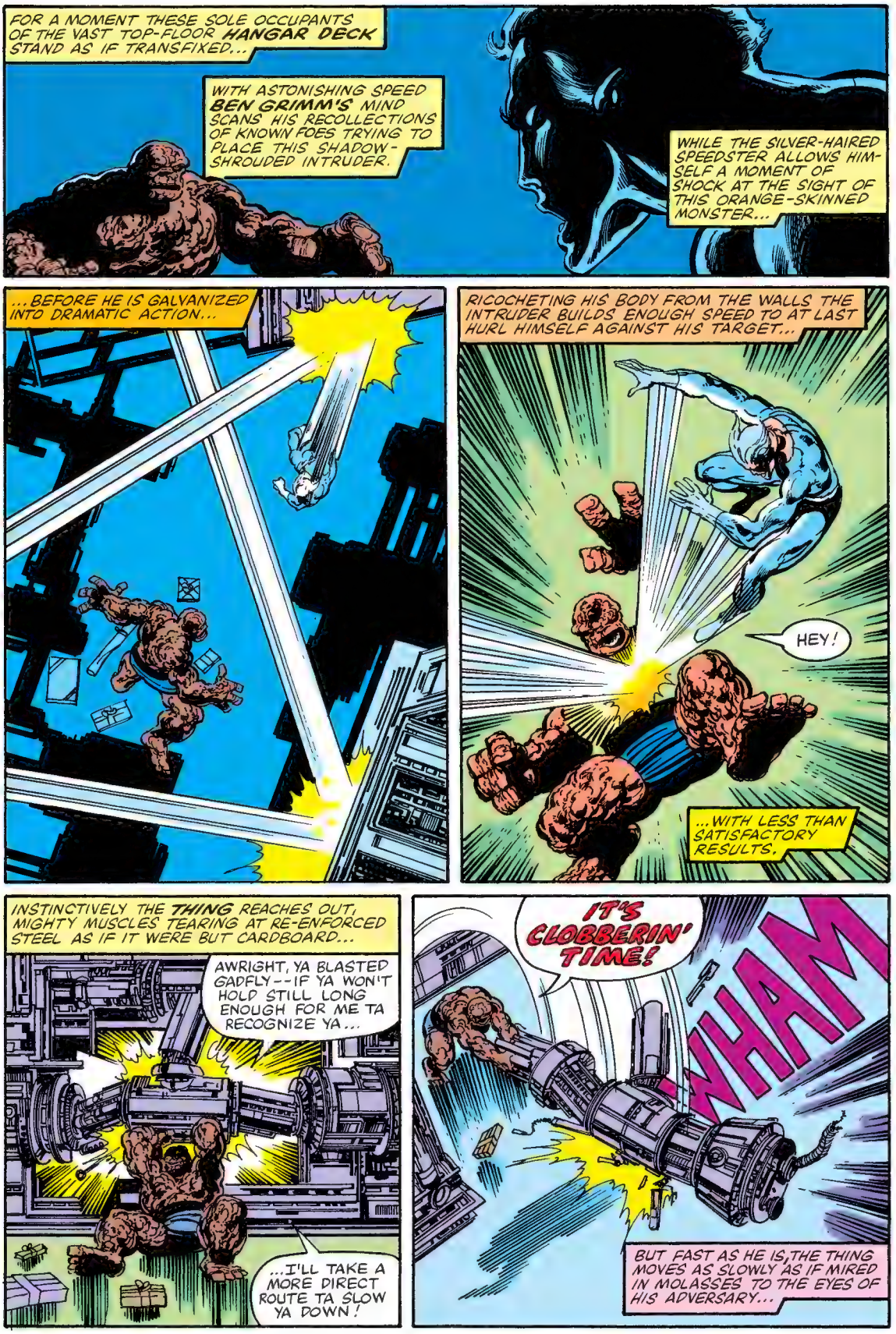

THROUGH THE GRIMY, SNOW-SLICKED STREETS OF MANHATTAN HE RUNS, OBLIVIOUS TO STARTLED PEDESTRIANS...
HEEDLESS OF BUSTLING TRAFFIC WHICH TO HIM SEEMS POISED MOTIONLESS, AS IF TIME ITSELF HAS HALTED.

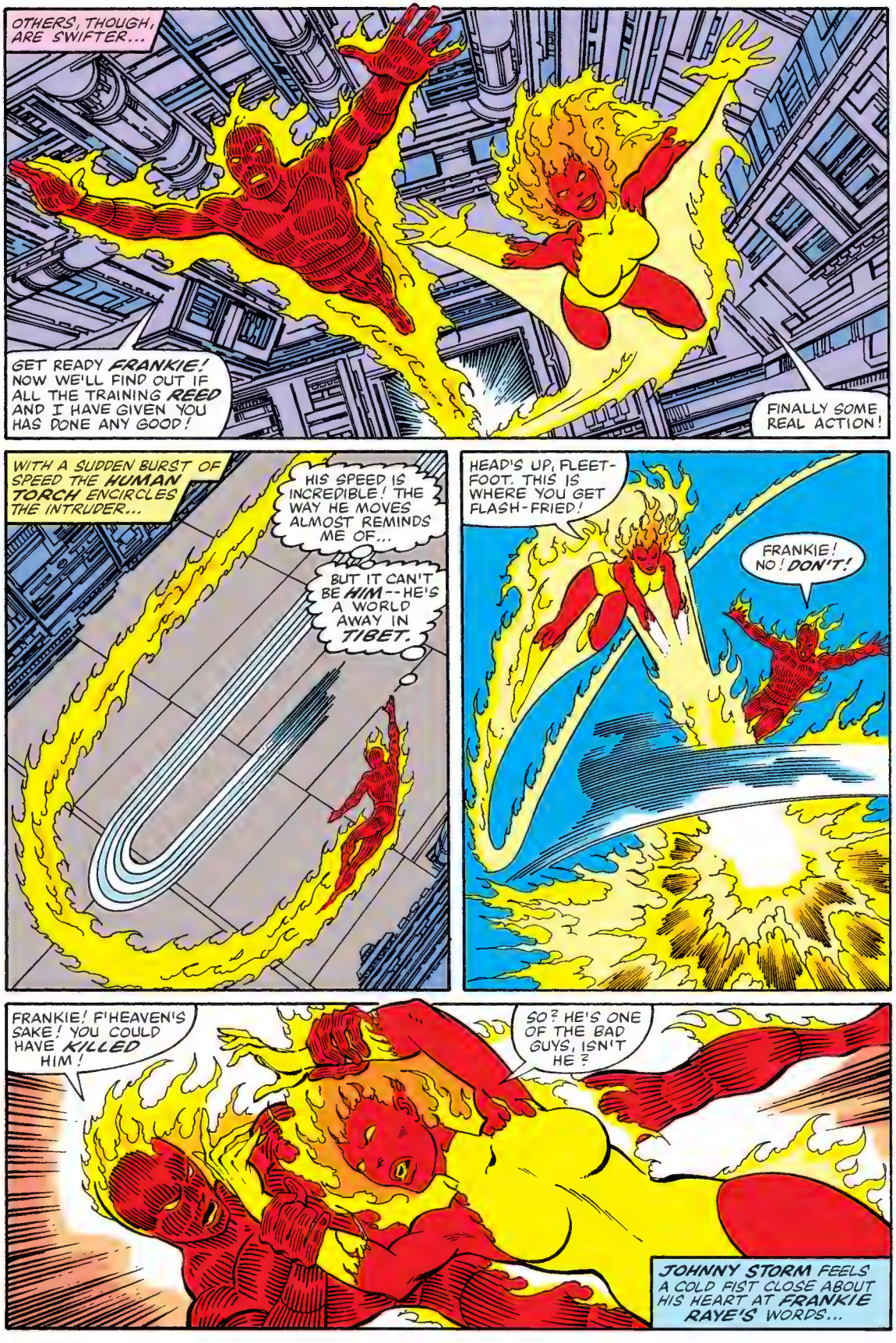
SUDDENLY HE SEES IT...
THE PAIN AND ANGUISH OF TWENTY THOUSAND MILES SLUICES FROM HIM. HIS GOAL IS ALMOST ACHIEVED.

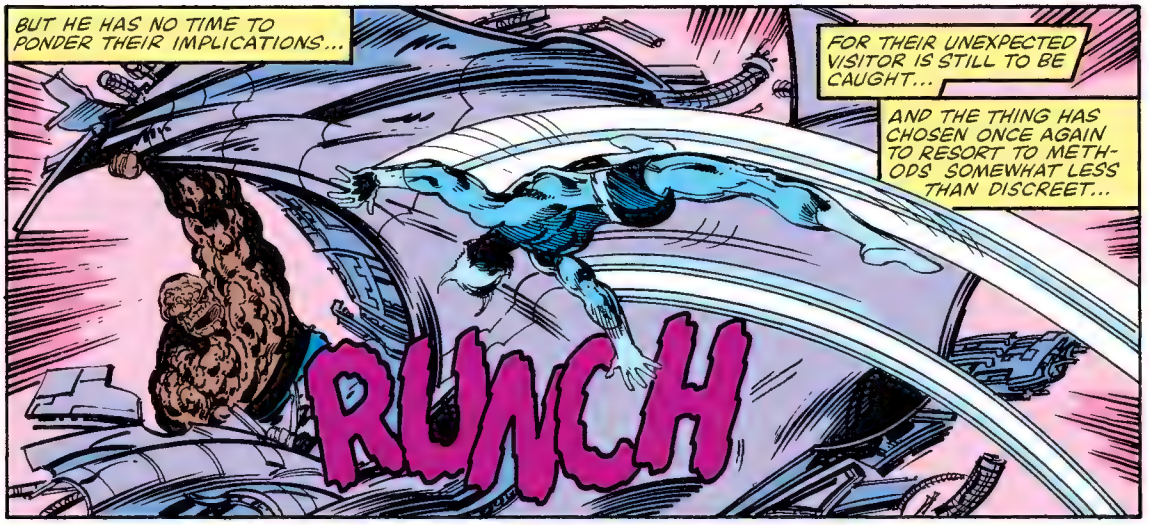
SLACKENING HIS PACE NOT THE SLIGHTEST HE LANCES UP THE SHEER FACE OF THE FAR-FAMED BAXTER BUILDING...
AND ONE WITH EYES SHARP ENOUGH TO MARK HIS JOURNEY MIGHT FOR A MOMENT WONDER IF THE LAW OF GRAVITY HAD BEEN REPEALED.

WHILE INSIDE...
I GIVE UP! IF FRANKLIN FINDS HIS CHRISTMAS PRESENTS AFTER I'VE STASHED 'EM UP HERE, I'M GONNA LET HIM KEEP 'EM!
IT JUST GETS HARDER AN' HARDER TA HIDE STUFF FROM THAT KID. IT'S ALMOST LIKE HE KNOWS WHAT I'M...

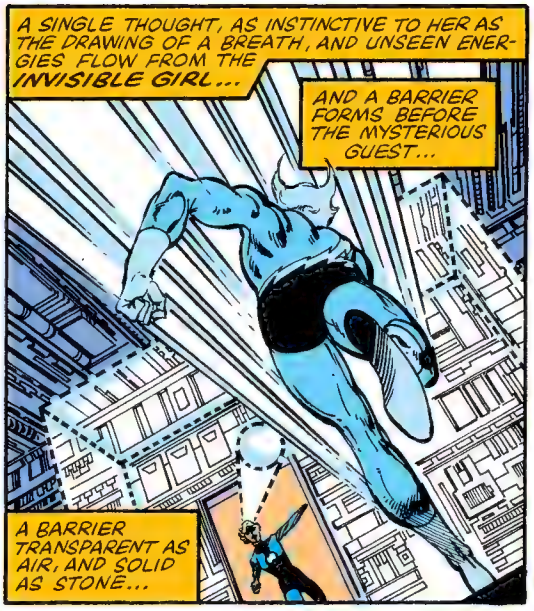

BRAAAANG
...THINKIN'...
THE INTRUDER ALERT ALARM SLICES THROUGH THE EVENING SILENCE...


FOR A MOMENT THESE SOLE OCCUPANTS OF THE VAST TOP-FLOOR HANGAR DECK STAND AS IF TRANSFIXED...
WITH ASTONISHING SPEED BEN GRIMM'S MIND SCANS HIS RECOLLECTIONS OF KNOWN FOES TRYING TO PLACE THIS SHADOW-SHROUDED INTRUDER.
WHILE THE SILVER-HAIRED SPEEDSTER ALLOWS HIMSELF A MOMENT OF SHOCK AT THE SIGHT OF THIS ORANGE-SKINNED MONSTER...
...BEFORE HE IS GALVANIZED INTO DRAMATIC ACTION...
RICOCHETING HIS BODY FROM THE WALLS THE INTRUDER BUILDS ENOUGH SPEED TO AT LAST HURL HIMSELF AGAINST HIS TARGET...
HEY!
...WITH LESS THAN SATISFACTORY RESULTS.
INSTINCTIVELY THE THING REACHES OUT, MIGHTY MUSCLES TEARING AT RE-ENFORCED STEEL AS IF IT WERE BUT CARDBOARD...
AWRIGHT, YA BLASTED GADFLY--IF YA WON'T HOLD STILL LONG ENOUGH FOR ME TA RECOGNIZE YA...
...I'LL TAKE A MORE DIRECT ROUTE TA SLOW YA DOWN!
IT'S CLOBBERIN' TIME!
WHAM
BUT FAST AS HE IS, THE THING MOVES AS SLOWLY AS IF MIRED IN MOLASSES TO THE EYES OF HIS ADVERSARY...

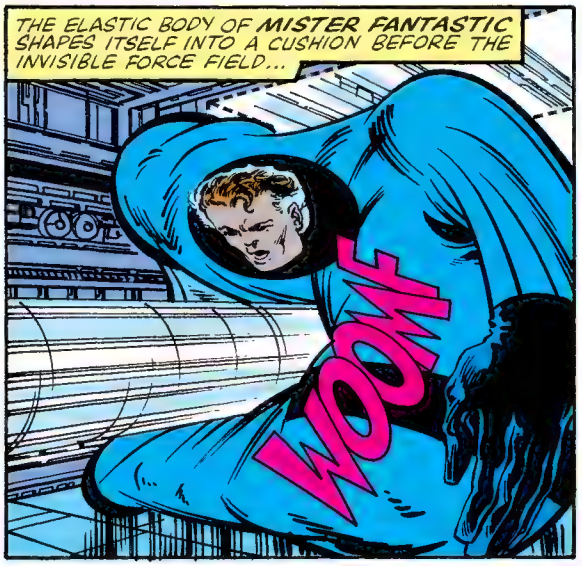

OTHERS, THOUGH, ARE SWIFTER...
GET READY FRANKIE! NOW WE'LL FIND OUT IF ALL THE TRAINING REED AND I HAVE GIVEN YOU HAS DONE ANY GOOD!
FINALLY SOME REAL ACTION!
WITH A SUDDEN BURST OF SPEED THE HUMAN TORCH ENCIRCLES THE INTRUDER...
HIS SPEED IS INCREDIBLE! THE WAY HE MOVES ALMOST REMINDS ME OF...
BUT IT CAN'T BE HIM--HE'S A WORLD AWAY IN TIBET.
HEAD'S UP, FLEET-FOOT. THIS IS WHERE YOU GET FLASH-FRIED!
FRANKIE! NO! DON'T!
FRANKIE! F'HEAVEN'S SAKE! YOU COULD HAVE KILLED HIM!
SO? HE'S ONE OF THE BAD GUYS, ISN'T HE?
JOHNNY STORM FEELS A COLD FIST CLOSE ABOUT HIS HEART AT FRANKIE RAYE'S WORDS...

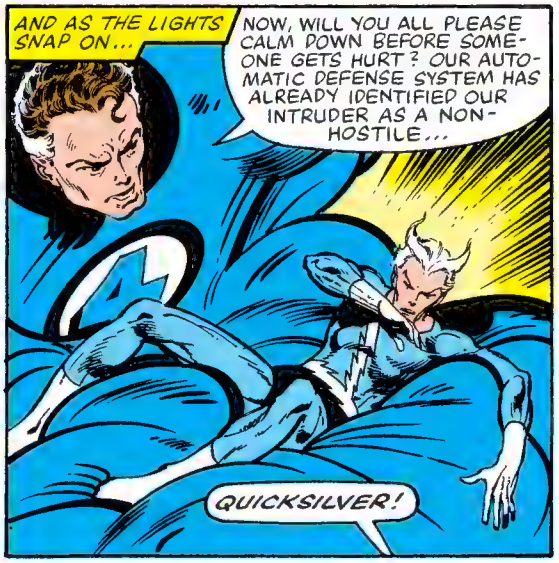

BUT HE HAS NO TIME TO PONDER THEIR IMPLICATIONS...
FOR THEIR UNEXPECTED VISITOR IS STILL TO BE CAUGHT...
AND THE THING HAS CHOSEN ONCE AGAIN TO RESORT TO METH-ODS SOMEWHAT LESS THAN DISCREET...
RUNCH

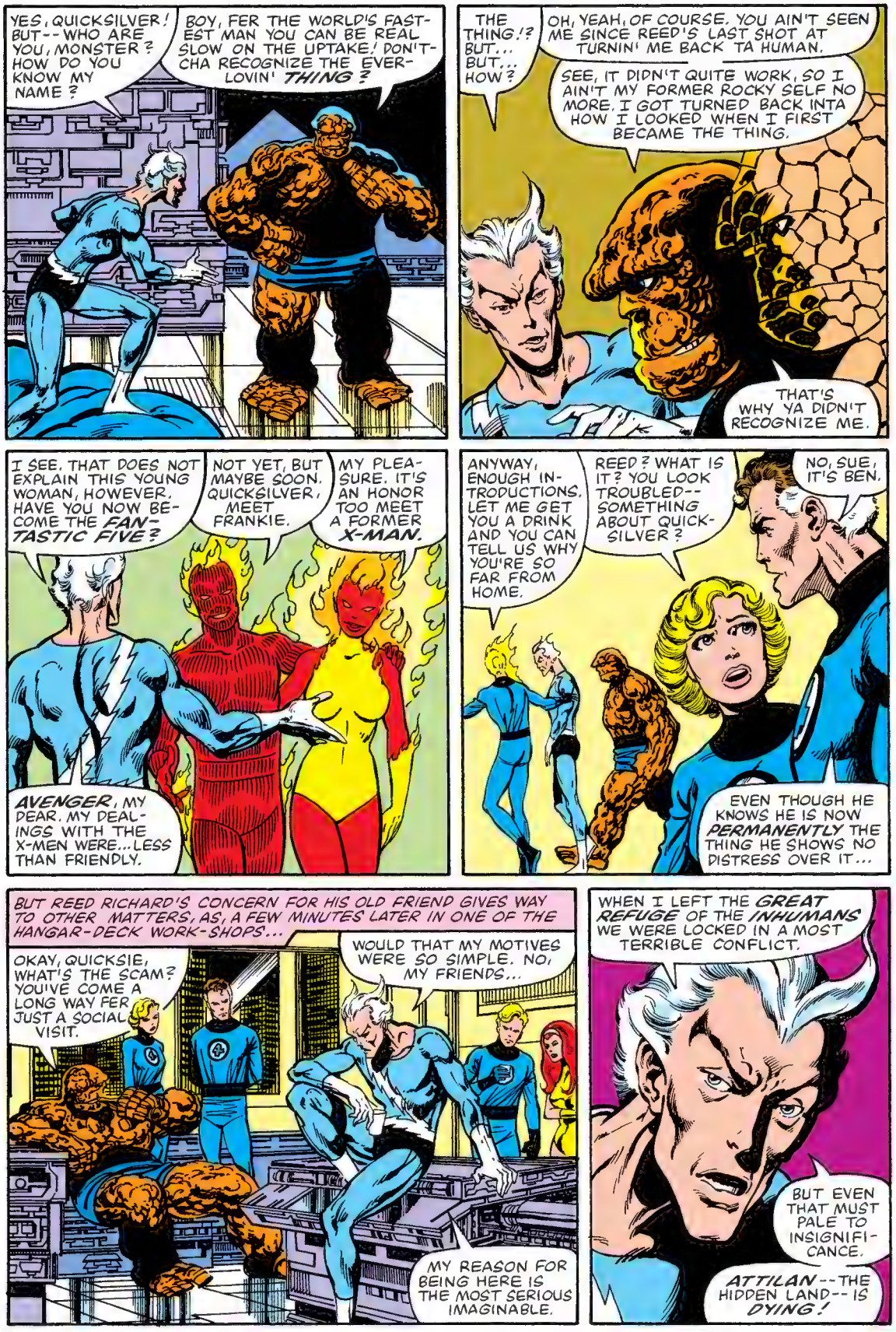
NOT FAR AWAY...
IT'S NO USE.
WHOEVER THAT MAN IS HIS SPEED MAKES ALL OF OUR TAC-TICS USELESS. ALL BUT ONE...


A SINGLE THOUGHT, AS INSTINCTIVE TO HER AS THE DRAWING OF A BREATH, AND UNSEEN ENER-GIES FLOW FROM THE INVISIBLE GIRL...
AND A BARRIER FORMS BEFORE THE MYSTERIOUS GUEST...
A BARRIER TRANSPARENT AS AIR, AND SOLID AS STONE...

BUT, BEFORE THE BONE-CRUSHING IMPACT OCCURS...
SUE! NO!
REED!

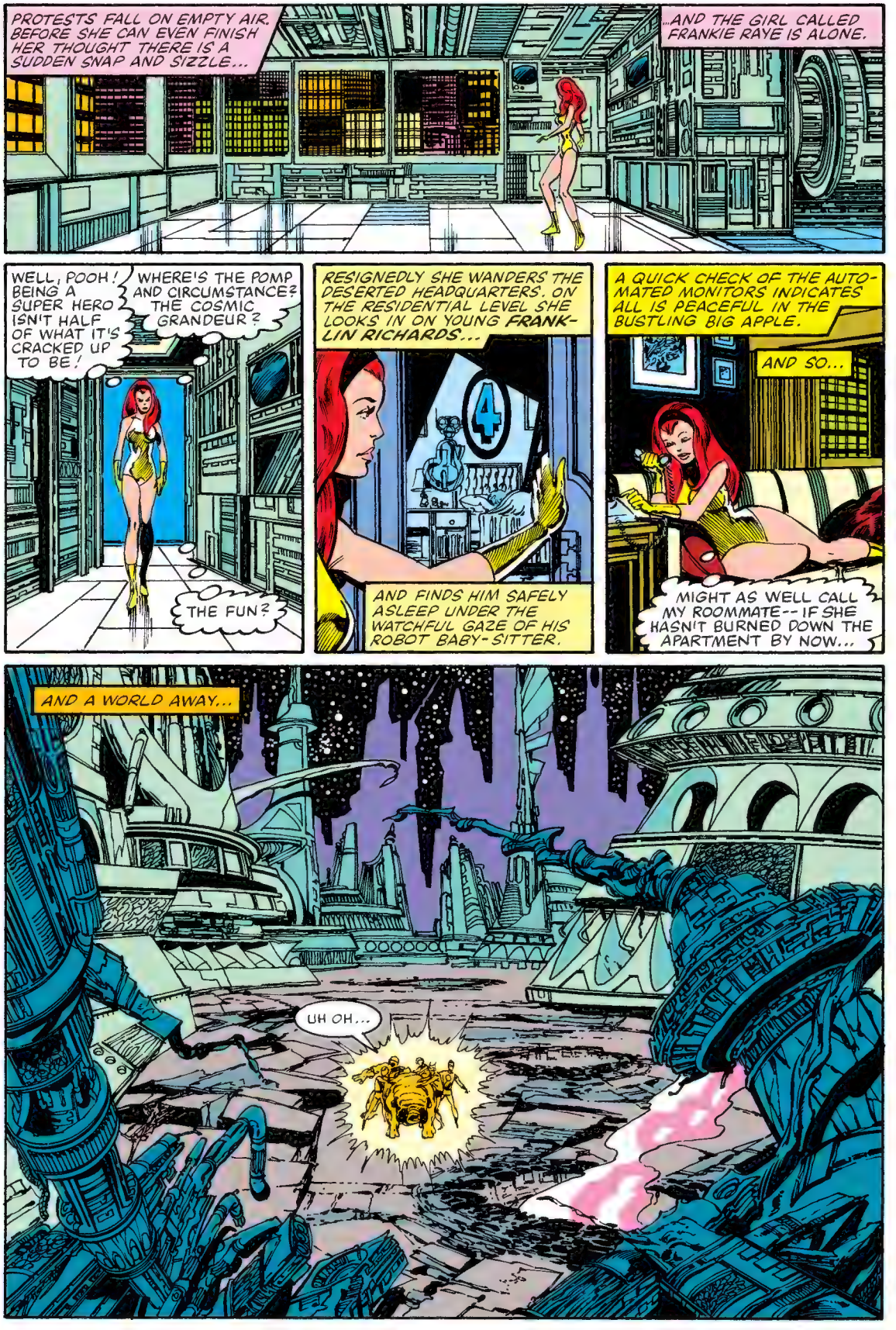

THE ELASTIC BODY OF MISTER FANTASTIC SHAPES ITSELF INTO A CUSHION BEFORE THE INVISIBLE FORCE FIELD...
WOOMF

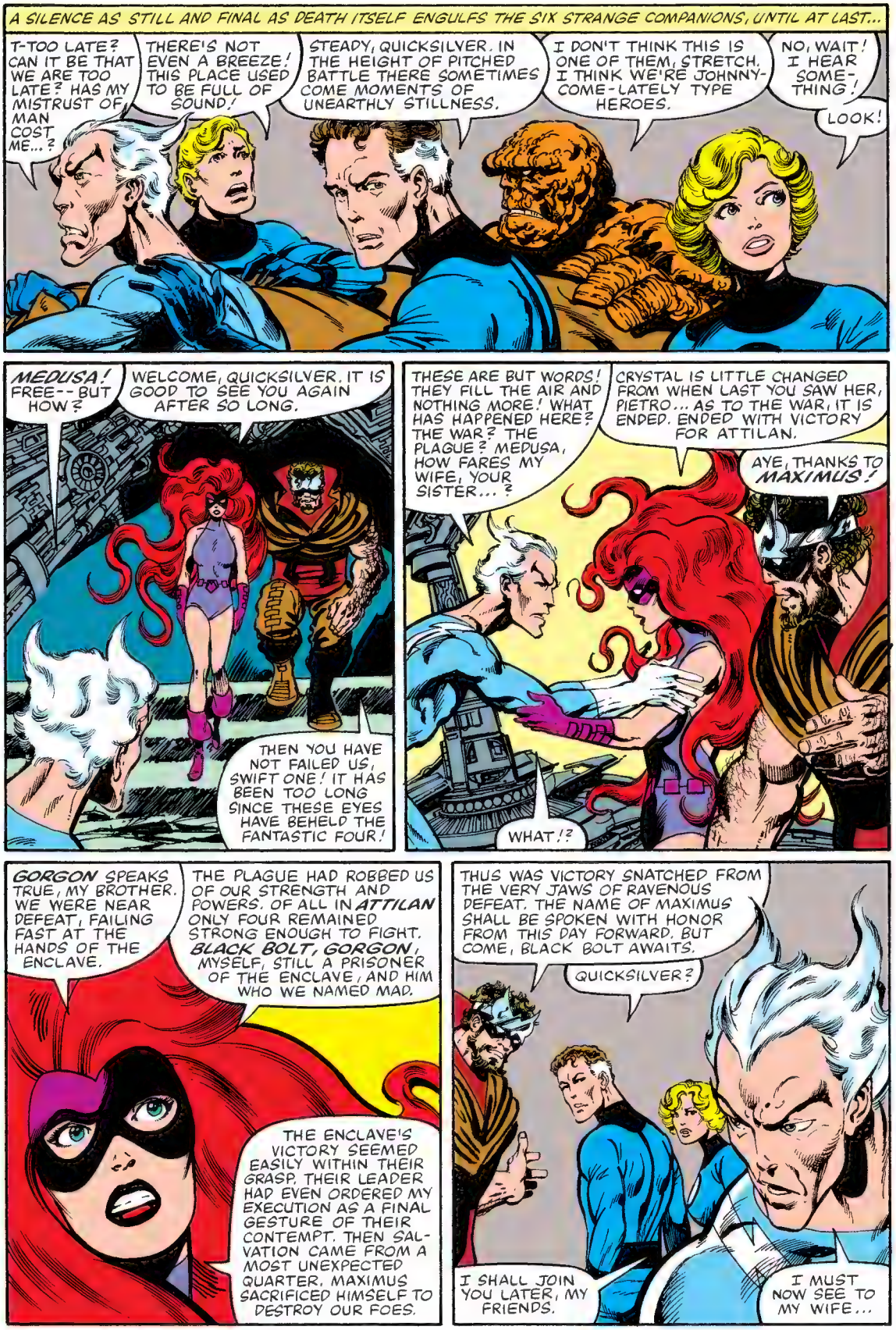

AND AS THE LIGHTS SNAP ON...
NOW, WILL YOU ALL PLEASE CALM DOWN BEFORE SOME-ONE GETS HURT? OUR AUTO-MATIC DEFENSE SYSTEM HAS ALREADY IDENTIFIED OUR INTRUDER AS A NON-HOSTILE...
QUICKSILVER!

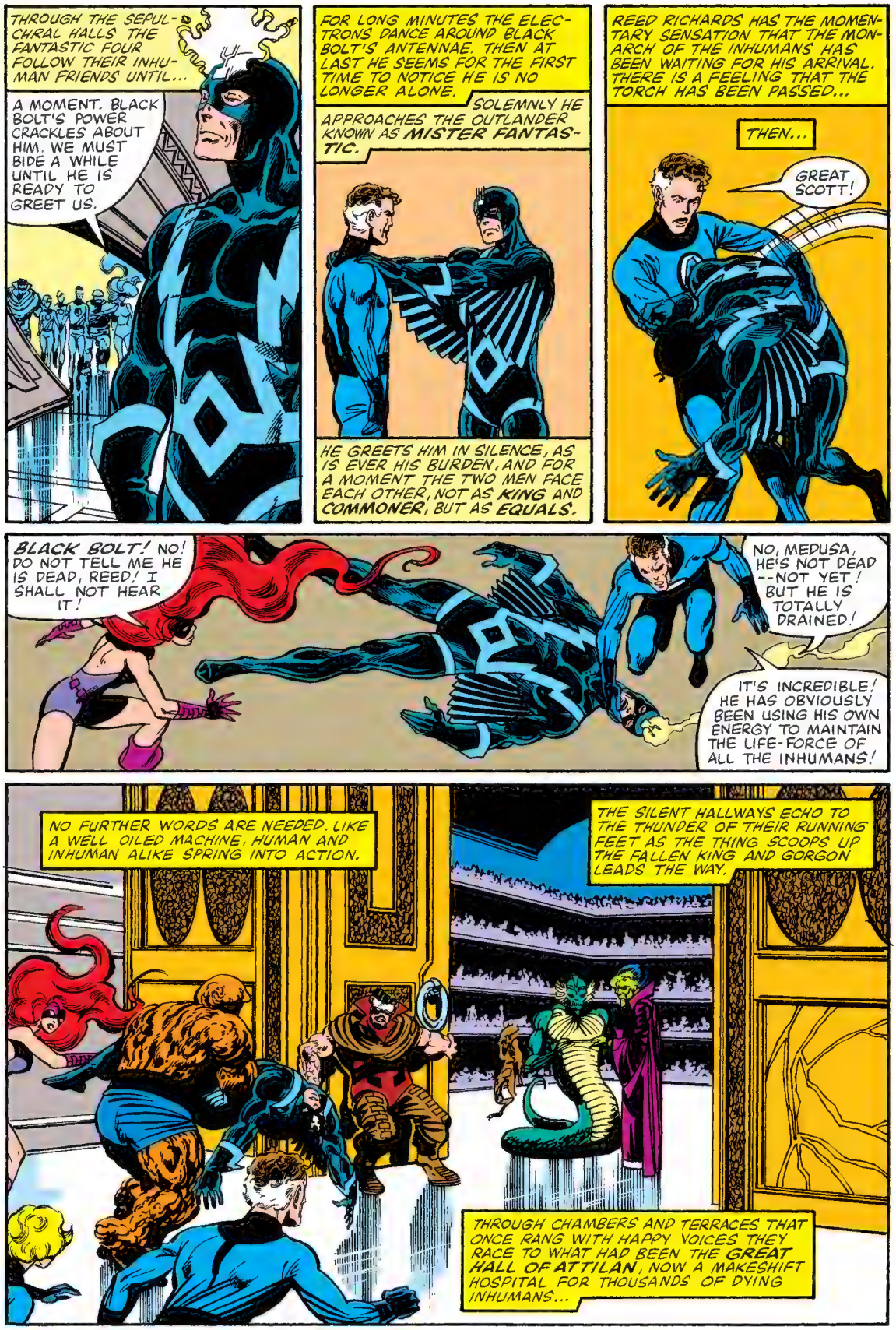

YES, QUICKSILVER! BUT--WHO ARE YOU, MONSTER? HOW DO YOU KNOW MY NAME?
BOY, FER THE WORLD'S FASTEST MAN YOU CAN BE REAL SLOW ON THE UPTAKE! DON'T-CHA RECOGNIZE THE EVER-LOVIN' THING?
THE THING!? BUT... BUT... HOW?
OH, YEAH, OF COURSE. YOU AIN'T SEEN ME SINCE REED'S LAST SHOT AT TURNIN' ME BACK TA HUMAN.
SEE, IT DIDN'T QUITE WORK, SO I AIN'T MY FORMER ROCKY SELF NO MORE. I GOT TURNED BACK INTA HOW I LOOKED WHEN I FIRST BECAME THE THING.
THAT'S WHY YA DIDN'T RECOGNIZE ME.
I SEE. THAT DOES NOT EXPLAIN THIS YOUNG WOMAN, HOWEVER. HAVE YOU NOW BECOME THE FANTASTIC FIVE?
NOT YET, BUT MAYBE SOON. QUICKSILVER, MEET FRANKIE.
MY PLEASURE. IT'S AN HONOR TOO MEET A FORMER X-MAN.
AVENGER, MY DEAR. MY DEALINGS WITH THE X-MEN WERE...LESS THAN FRIENDLY.
ANYWAY, ENOUGH INTRODUCTIONS. LET ME GET YOU A DRINK AND YOU CAN TELL US WHY YOU'RE SO FAR FROM HOME.
REED? WHAT IS IT? YOU LOOK TROUBLED--SOMETHING ABOUT QUICKSILVER?
NO, SUE, IT'S BEN.
EVEN THOUGH HE KNOWS HE IS NOW PERMANENTLY THE THING HE SHOWS NO DISTRESS OVER IT...
BUT REED RICHARD'S CONCERN FOR HIS OLD FRIEND GIVES WAY TO OTHER MATTERS, AS, A FEW MINUTES LATER IN ONE OF THE HANGAR-DECK WORK-SHOPS...
OKAY, QUICKSIE, WHAT'S THE SCAM? YOU'VE COME A LONG WAY FER JUST A SOCIAL VISIT.
WOULD THAT MY MOTIVES WERE SO SIMPLE. NO, MY FRIENDS...
MY REASON FOR BEING HERE IS THE MOST SERIOUS IMAGINABLE.
WHEN I LEFT THE GREAT REFUGE OF THE INHUMANS WE WERE LOCKED IN A MOST TERRIBLE CONFLICT.
BUT EVEN THAT MUST PALE TO INSIGNIFICANCE.
ATTILAN--THE HIDDEN LAND--IS DYING!

"BUT I FORGET MYSELF, LETTING MY THOUGHTS AND WORDS RACE MORE SWIFTLY THAN MY FEET. YOU MUST NOW LEARN THAT IT BEGAN MANY WEEKS AGO, WHEN MY BRIDE CRYSTAL AND HER SISTER MEDUSA WERE OUTSIDE OUR HIMALAYAN SHELTER...
"MEDUSA IS ONE OF THE GREATEST WARRIORS OF ATTILAN, YET IN HER HEART SHE HOLDS A SPECIAL LOVE FOR THE SNOW-BLOOMING LILLISCANDRAS...
"THE TWO WERE PICKING THOSE RARE BLOSSOMS WHEN A STRANGE SKY-SHIP PENETRATED OUR PERIMETER.
"WITHOUT WARNING CAME A SUDDEN BURST OF BLACK LIGHT...
"...AND MEDUSA WAS GONE!
"ALONE IT TOOK CRYSTAL THE BETTER PART OF A DAY TO MAKE HER WAY BACK TO ATTILAN WITH THE DIRE NEWS...
"IT IS A MARK OF THE TRUE NOBILITY OF OUR RULER, THE EVER-SILENT BLACK BOLT, THAT HE BORE SO WELL THE NEWS OF HIS BELOVED'S ABDUCTION.
"BUT WE HAD LITTLE TIME FOR GRIEF.
"WITHIN A WEEK THE HIDDEN LAND WAS UNDER ATTACK, SKY-SHIPS IN LEGION RAINING BLACK DEATH FROM ABOVE.
"FROM A SINGLE PRISONER TAKEN IN BATTLE WE LEARNED OUR ATTACKERS WERE POWER-HUNGRY HUMANS WHO CALLED THEMSELVES THE ENCLAVE...
"AND WE LEARNED THEY HAD AN ALLY IN ATTILAN...
"A MOST FOUL VIPER AT OUR VERY BOSOM...
"MAXIMUS, RIGHTLY CALLED "THE MAD", BROTHER OF BLACK BOLT!
"TRAGEDY FOLLOWED HARD UPON TRAGEDY IN THE DAYS TO COME...
"AS THE WAR WENT ON THE INHUMANS BEGAN TO LOSE GROUND...
"NOT TO THE ENCLAVE, BUT TO A MYSTERIOUS MALADY WHICH FELLED THEM BY THE HUNDREDS..."

WHEN I LEFT THE HIDDEN LAND A WEEK AGO, OVER FIFTY OF THE INHUMANS WERE DEAD OF THE PLAGUE. I ALONE OF ALL IN ATTILAN WAS UNAFFECTED, PERHAPS BECAUSE I AM A MUTANT, NOT AN INHUMAN.
BUT MY BELOVED CRYSTAL ALSO LIES NEAR DEATH, AND SHOULD SHE PERISH, I SHALL LOSE NOT ONLY HER, BUT OUR UNBORN CHILD AS WELL.
CRYSTAL... PREGNANT?
UH-OH, SOMETHING TOUCHED A NERVE. I KNOW JOHNNY HAS NEVER REALLY GOTTEN OVER LOSING HER TO QUICKSILVER.
YOU IDIOT! IF CRYSTAL... I MEAN, IF THE INHUMANS ARE IN TROUBLE WHY DID YOU COME ON FOOT? YOU COULD HAVE BEEN HERE IN AN INSTANT WITH LOCKJAW'S TELEPORTING POWER!
UNHAND ME, HUMAN! CRYSTAL'S LOYAL PET WOULD NOT LEAVE HER SIDE UNTIL SURE YOU WOULD COME TO OUR AID.
THAT GOES WITHOUT SAYING, QUICKSILVER. THE INHUMANS ARE OUR FRIENDS. WE WOULD NEVER TURN OUR BACKS ON THEM.
THEN IS THE SIGNAL SENT.
AND SHOULD WE ARRIVE TOO LATE, BLAME MY OWN DISTRUST OF EVER-TREACHEROUS HOMO-SAPIENS!
FASTER THAN A THOUGHT THE CALL FLASHES TO THE FAR SIDE OF THE GLOBE, AND IN AN INSTANT...
HERE HE COMES. LOCKJAW HAS TRACED QUICKSILVER'S MENTAL ENERGIES...
HE'S OPENED A DIMENSIONAL PORTAL FROM THE HIMALAYAS.
THE DOUR COUNTENANCE OF THIS STRANGEST OF INHUMANS SEEMS SADDER THAN EVER...
QUICKSILVER FEELS HIS HEART SINK, BUT STIFLES SUCH EMOTION WITH ACTION...
NUTS! I DIDN'T EVEN FINISH MY ROOT BEER!
LOCKJAW, IT'S ME, JOHNNY! YOU REMEMBER?
QUICKLY, FAITHFUL ONE! BACK TO ATTILAN, AND YOUR COUSINS!
FRANKIE, YOU MUST REMAIN HERE.
YOUR TRAINING ISN'T COMPLETE ENOUGH TO FACE WHAT MAY LIE AHEAD...
BUT...

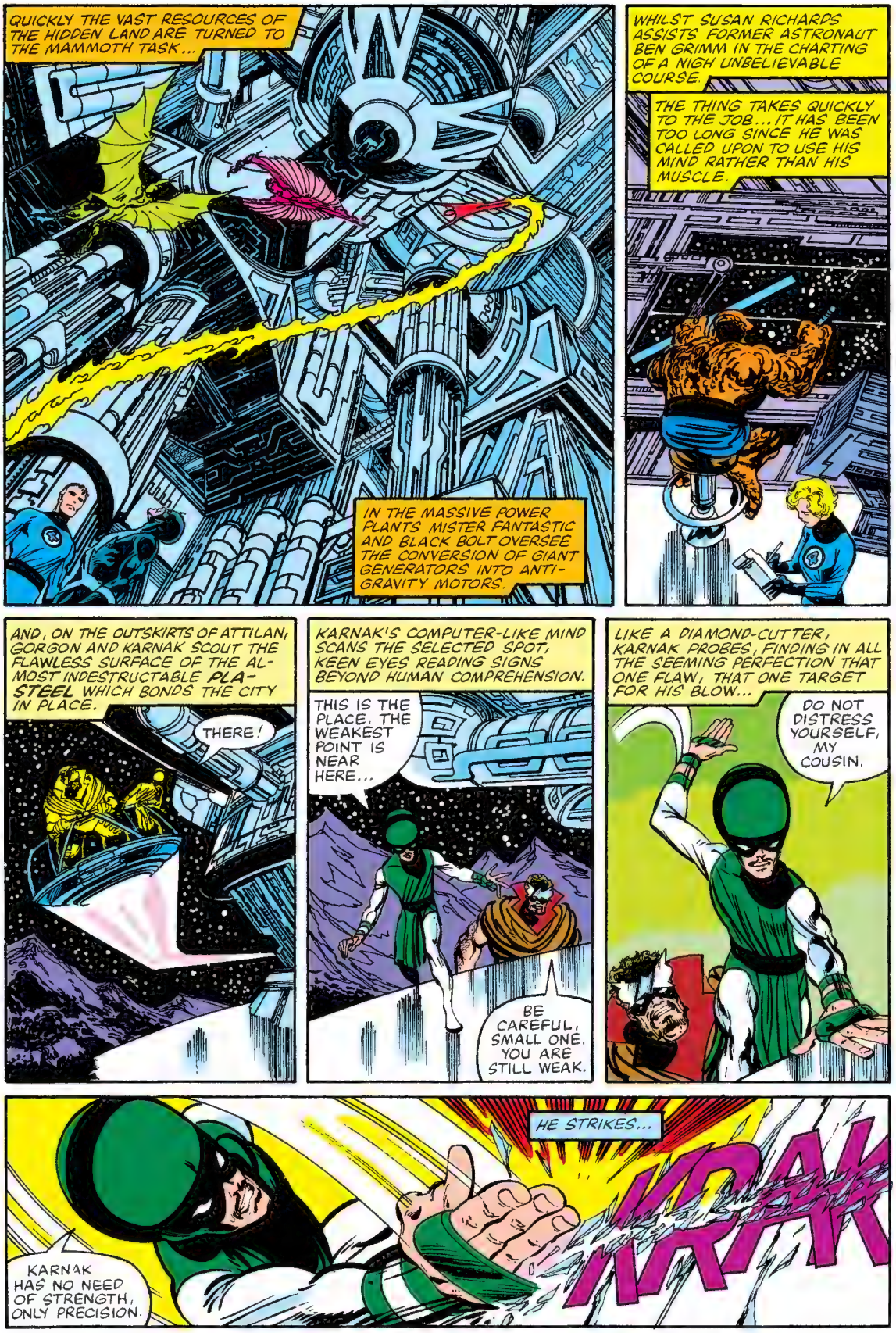

PROTESTS FALL ON EMPTY AIR. BEFORE SHE CAN EVEN FINISH HER THOUGHT THERE IS A SUDDEN SNAP AND SIZZLE...
...AND THE GIRL CALLED FRANKIE RAYE IS ALONE.
WELL, POOH! BEING A SUPER HERO ISN'T HALF OF WHAT IT'S CRACKED UP TO BE!
WHERE'S THE POMP AND CIRCUMSTANCE? THE COSMIC GRANDEUR?
THE FUN?
RESIGNEDLY SHE WANDERS THE DESERTED HEADQUARTERS. ON THE RESIDENTIAL LEVEL SHE LOOKS IN ON YOUNG FRANKLIN RICHARDS...
AND FINDS HIM SAFELY ASLEEP UNDER THE WATCHFUL GAZE OF HIS ROBOT BABY-SITTER.
A QUICK CHECK OF THE AUTOMATED MONITORS INDICATES ALL IS PEACEFUL IN THE BUSTLING BIG APPLE.
AND SO...
MIGHT AS WELL CALL MY ROOMMATE--IF SHE HASN'T BURNED DOWN THE APARTMENT BY NOW...
AND A WORLD AWAY...
UH OH...

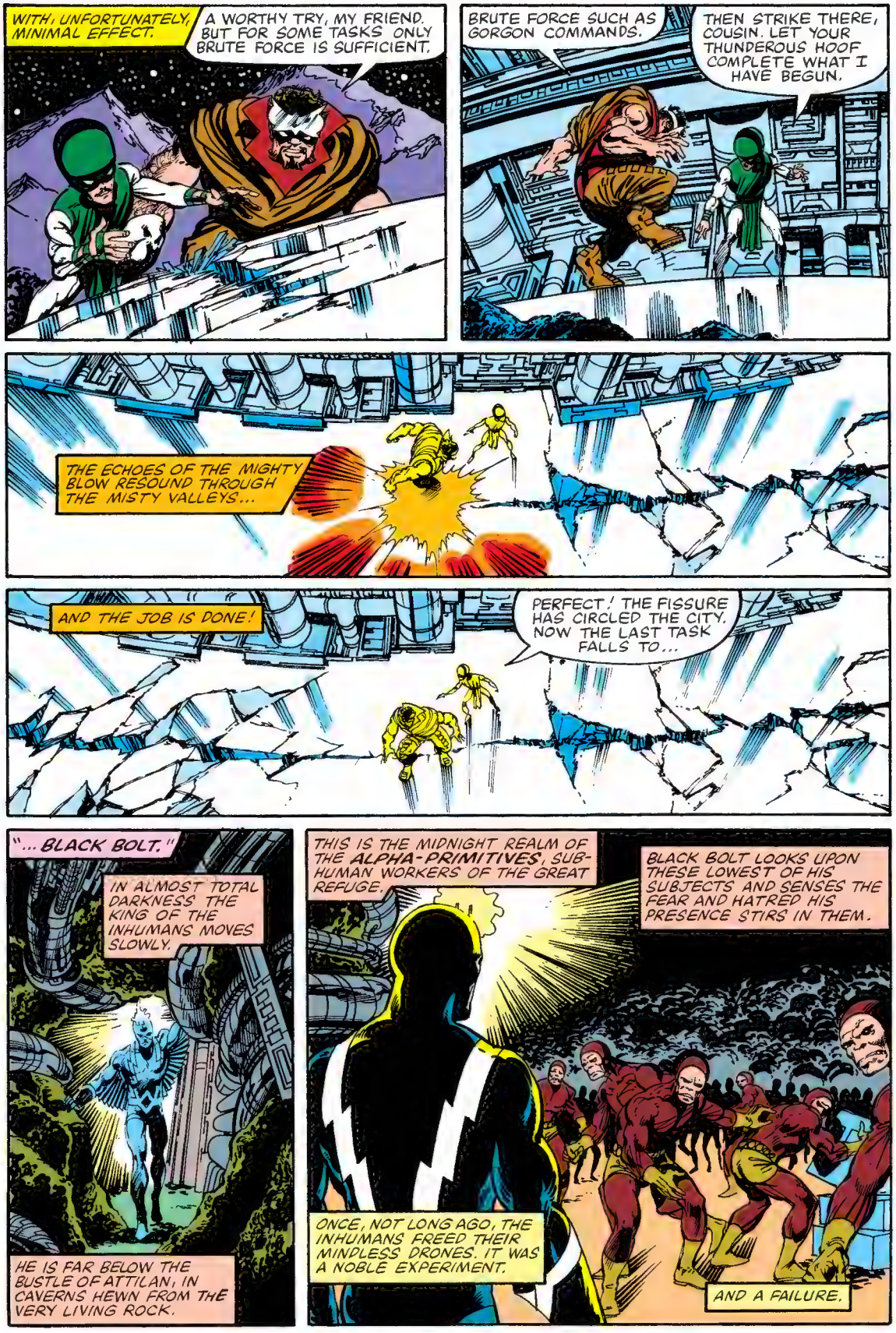

A SILENCE AS STILL AND FINAL AS DEATH ITSELF ENGULFS THE SIX STRANGE COMPANIONS, UNTIL AT LAST...
T-TOO LATE? CAN IT BE THAT WE ARE TOO LATE? HAS MY MISTRUST OF MAN COST ME...?
THERE'S NOT EVEN A BREEZE! THIS PLACE USED TO BE FULL OF SOUND!
STEADY, QUICKSILVER. IN THE HEIGHT OF PITCHED BATTLE THERE SOMETIMES COME MOMENTS OF UNEARTHLY STILLNESS.
I DON'T THINK THIS IS ONE OF THEM, STRETCH. I THINK WE'RE JOHNNY-COME-LATELY TYPE HEROES.
NO, WAIT! I HEAR SOME-THING!
LOOK!
MEDUSA! FREE--BUT HOW?
WELCOME, QUICKSILVER. IT IS GOOD TO SEE YOU AGAIN AFTER SO LONG.
THEN YOU HAVE NOT FAILED US, SWIFT ONE! IT HAS BEEN TOO LONG SINCE THESE EYES HAVE BEHELD THE FANTASTIC FOUR!
THESE ARE BUT WORDS! THEY FILL THE AIR AND NOTHING MORE! WHAT HAS HAPPENED HERE? THE WAR? THE PLAGUE? MEDUSA, HOW FARES MY WIFE, YOUR SISTER...?
CRYSTAL IS LITTLE CHANGED FROM WHEN LAST YOU SAW HER, PIETRO... AS TO THE WAR, IT IS ENDED. ENDED WITH VICTORY FOR ATTILAN.
AYE, THANKS TO MAXIMUS!
WHAT!?
GORGON SPEAKS TRUE, MY BROTHER. WE WERE NEAR DEFEAT, FAILING FAST AT THE HANDS OF THE ENCLAVE.
THE PLAGUE HAD ROBBED US OF OUR STRENGTH AND POWERS. OF ALL IN ATTILAN ONLY FOUR REMAINED STRONG ENOUGH TO FIGHT. BLACK BOLT, GORGON, MYSELF, STILL A PRISONER OF THE ENCLAVE, AND HIM WHO WE NAMED MAD.
THE ENCLAVE'S VICTORY SEEMED EASILY WITHIN THEIR GRASP. THEIR LEADER HAD EVEN ORDERED MY EXECUTION AS A FINAL GESTURE OF THEIR CONTEMPT. THEN SALVATION CAME FROM A MOST UNEXPECTED QUARTER. MAXIMUS SACRIFICED HIMSELF TO DESTROY OUR FOES.
THUS WAS VICTORY SNATCHED FROM THE VERY JAWS OF RAVENOUS DEFEAT. THE NAME OF MAXIMUS SHALL BE SPOKEN WITH HONOR FROM THIS DAY FORWARD. BUT COME, BLACK BOLT AWAITS.
QUICKSILVER?
I SHALL JOIN YOU LATER, MY FRIENDS.
I MUST NOW SEE TO MY WIFE...

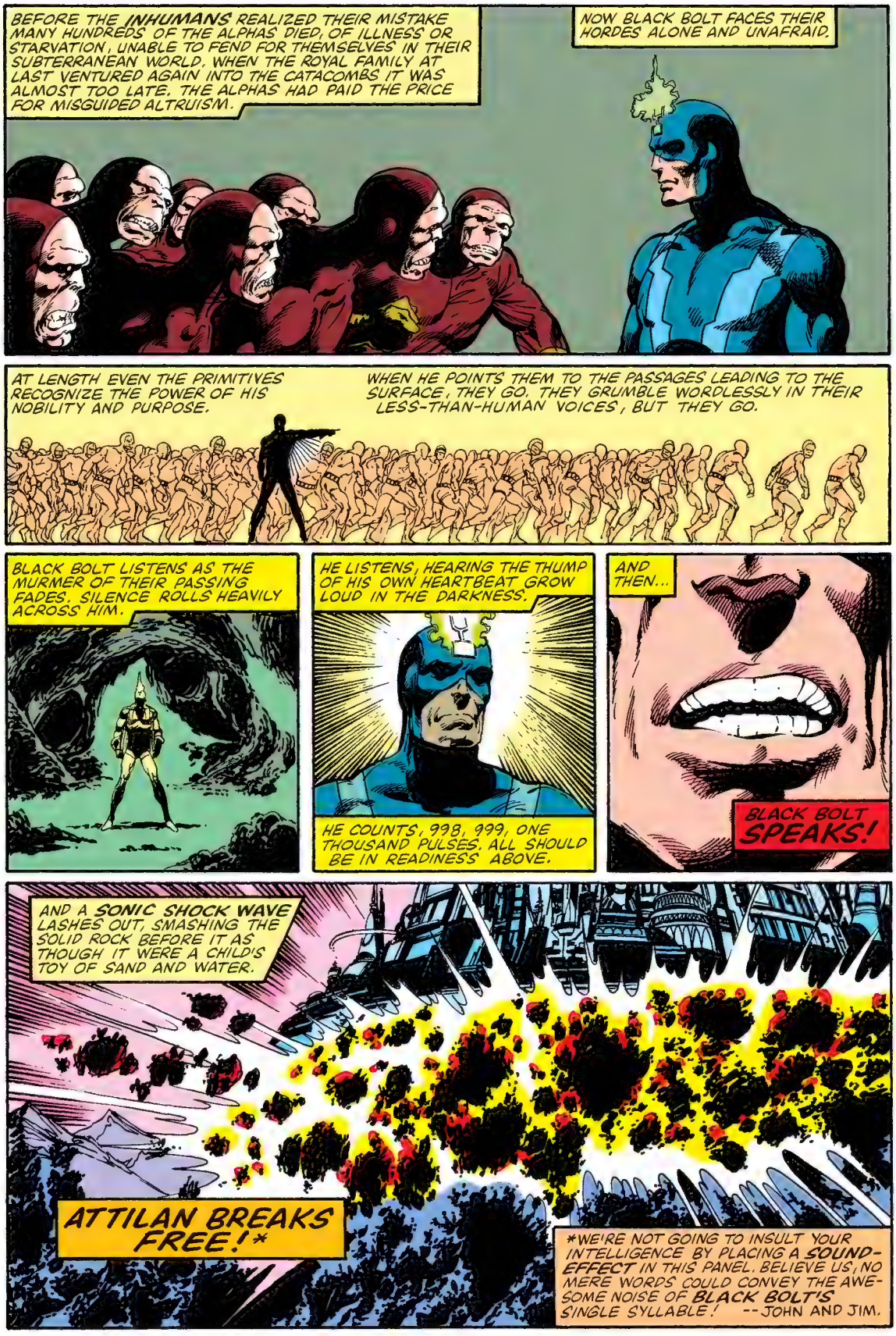

THROUGH THE SEPULCHRAL HALLS THE FANTASTIC FOUR FOLLOW THEIR INHUMAN FRIENDS UNTIL...
A MOMENT. BLACK BOLT'S POWER CRACKLES ABOUT HIM. WE MUST BIDE A WHILE UNTIL HE IS READY TO GREET US.
FOR LONG MINUTES THE ELECTRONS DANCE AROUND BLACK BOLT'S ANTENNAE. THEN AT LAST HE SEEMS FOR THE FIRST TIME TO NOTICE HE IS NO LONGER ALONE.
SOLEMNLY HE APPROACHES THE OUTLANDER KNOWN AS MISTER FANTASTIC.
HE GREETS HIM IN SILENCE, AS IS EVER HIS BURDEN, AND FOR A MOMENT THE TWO MEN FACE EACH OTHER, NOT AS KING AND COMMONER, BUT AS EQUALS.
REED RICHARDS HAS THE MOMENTARY SENSATION THAT THE MONARCH OF THE INHUMANS HAS BEEN WAITING FOR HIS ARRIVAL. THERE IS A FEELING THAT THE TORCH HAS BEEN PASSED...
THEN...
GREAT SCOTT!
BLACK BOLT! NO! DO NOT TELL ME HE IS DEAD, REED! I SHALL NOT HEAR IT!
NO, MEDUSA, HE'S NOT DEAD --NOT YET! BUT HE IS TOTALLY DRAINED!
IT'S INCREDIBLE! HE HAS OBVIOUSLY BEEN USING HIS OWN ENERGY TO MAINTAIN THE LIFE-FORCE OF ALL THE INHUMANS!
NO FURTHER WORDS ARE NEEDED. LIKE A WELL OILED MACHINE, HUMAN AND INHUMAN ALIKE SPRING INTO ACTION.
THE SILENT HALLWAYS ECHO TO THE THUNDER OF THEIR RUNNING FEET AS THE THING SCOOPS UP THE FALLEN KING AND GORGON LEADS THE WAY.
THROUGH CHAMBERS AND TERRACES THAT ONCE RANG WITH HAPPY VOICES THEY RACE TO WHAT HAD BEEN THE GREAT HALL OF ATTILAN, NOW A MAKESHIFT HOSPITAL FOR THOUSANDS OF DYING INHUMANS...

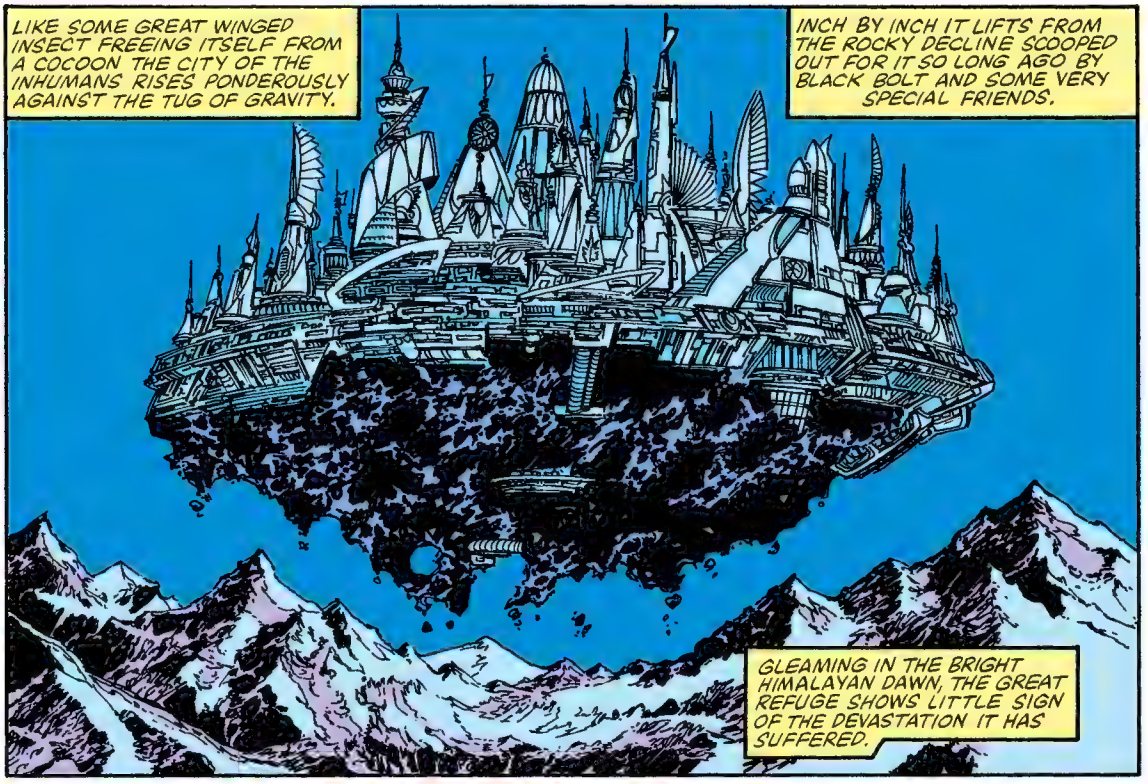
WITH UNCHARACTERISTIC TENDERNESS THE BRUTE-LIKE THING LAYS THE STRICKEN RULER ON THE BED PREPARED FOR HIM.
I WARNED HIM THIS WOULD HAPPEN. GREAT IS THE STRENGTH OF BLACK BOLT, BUT THIS TASK WAS BEYOND EVEN HIM.
THE THING TRIES TO ANSWER, BUT FINDS HIS THROAT SUDDENLY CONSTRICTED. HE IS FRANKLY IN AWE.
SLEEP NOW, BELOVED. NO KING IN ALL OF MORTAL HISTORY HAS SACRIFICED FOR HIS PEOPLE SO MUCH AS YOU. SLEEP. SLEEP.
BLACK BOLT'S EYES FLICKER OPEN. WORDS LONG UNSPOKEN PASS WITHOUT NEED OF VOICE BETWEEN THESE TWO.
THE LOVE OF BLACK BOLT AND MEDUSA IS BUT THE CALM AT THE HEART OF WHAT IS NOW ANOTHER KIND OF WAR.
HOW'S HE DOIN', DOC?
THE WISDOM OF YOUR LEADER IS LEGEND AMONGST MY PEOPLE, BEN GRIMM. YET I CONFESS I HAD NOT TRULY BELIEVED IT UNTIL NOW.
HOURS CRAWL BY AS SLOWLY AS DAYS AS MISTER FANTASTIC TESTS, CORELLATES, AND RETESTS THE MYRIAD DATA. THEN...
I'M AFRAID IT'S AS I GUESSED IT MIGHT BE WHEN QUICKSILVER SAID HE WAS UNAFFECTED. THIS IS THE SAME MALADY WHICH ONCE STRUCK CRYSTAL, AND FORCED HER TO LEAVE THE FANTASTIC FOUR AND RETURN TO ATTILAN, YEARS AGO.
I HAVE SYNTHESIZED A TEMPORARY ANTIDOTE.
GIVE IT TO THE WEAKEST OF THE STRICKEN--AND THE ROYAL FAMILY.
"WE HAVE MUCH TO PLAN..."
REED'S ORDERS ARE FOLLOWED, AND WITHIN MINUTES A KIND OF LIFE RETURNS TO THE STILL HALLS.
THEY ARE WELL AND STRONG AGAIN. TRULY YOU ARE A WORKER OF MIRACLES, REED!
NO, MEDUSA! SIMPLY A SCIENTIST DOING HIS JOB. BUT OUR WORRIES AREN'T OVER YET.
BLACK BOLT, YOU MUST REALIZE THIS IS ONLY A TEMPORARY MEASURE, A STOP-GAP. WHEN CRYSTAL WAS FIRST STRICKEN IT WAS BECAUSE HER BODY HAD NO IMMUNITY TO THE POLLUTANTS IN THE AIR BEYOND THE HIMALAYAS.
BUT THERE IS NO LONGER ANYWHERE ON EARTH WHERE THE AIR IS TRULY CLEAN.
THE ANTIDOTE I HAVE CREATED CAN STAVE OFF THE EFFECTS OF YOUR STEADILY MORE CONTAMINATED AIR, BUT TO CONSTANTLY PUMP CHEMICALS INTO YOUR BODIES...
BLACK BOLT NODS.

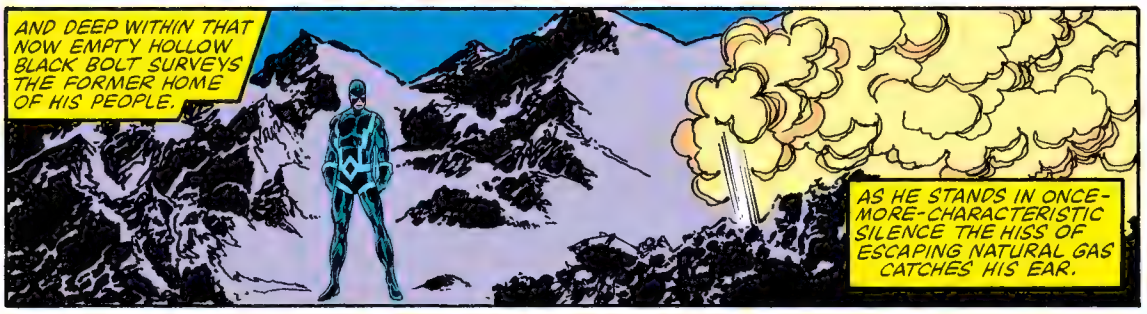
THEN THE SOLUTION IS OBVIOUS, REED RICHARDS. THE GREAT REFUGE MUST BE MOVED. MOVED TO SOME OTHER PLACE, WHERE THE AIR IS FRESH AND CLEAN.
I'M AFRAID YOU'RE MISSING THE POINT, KARNAK. THERE'S NO WHERE TO GO, EVEN WERE SUCH A MOVE POSSIBLE.
BUT IT IS POSSIBLE, REED! THIS HIMALAYAN VALLEY IS NOT THE ORIGINAL LOCATION OF ATTILAN. THE CITY HAS BEEN MOVED BEFORE...
YER KIDDIN'!
"NO, BEN GRIMM. YEARS AGO, FEARING DISCOVERY BY THE OUTSIDE WORLD, BLACK BOLT ARRANGED FOR THE ISLAND OF ATTILAN TO BE RELOCATED, HERE IN TIBET.
"IT WAS A COLOSSAL FEAT, BUT IT WAS ACCOMPLISHED. *
*SEE WHAT IF #30.-- JIM S.
SUNNUVAGUN! THAT BEATS STRETCHO HERE EVEN ON A GOOD DAY. TOO BAD YA GOT THAT KINDA TECHNOLOGY TA BACK YA UP, BUT STILL NO-WHERE ON EARTH TA GO...
"NOWHERE ON EARTH?" BEN, THAT'S IT! THAT'S THE ANSWER!
IT WOULD MEAN GRAVE RISK AND DOUBTLESS GREAT HARDSHIPS...
BUT THERE IS A PLACE!

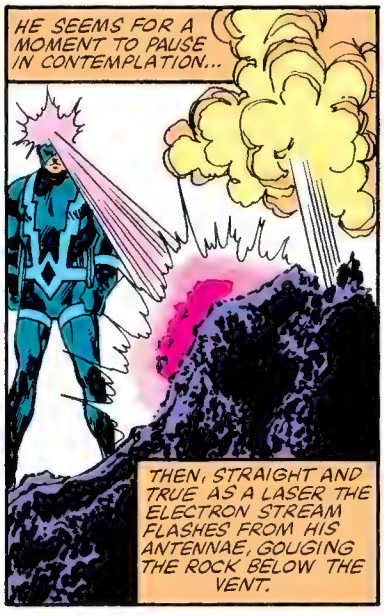

QUICKLY THE VAST RESOURCES OF THE HIDDEN LAND ARE TURNED TO THE MAMMOTH TASK...
IN THE MASSIVE POWER PLANTS MISTER FANTASTIC AND BLACK BOLT OVERSEE THE CONVERSION OF GIANT GENERATORS INTO ANTI-GRAVITY MOTORS.
WHILST SUSAN RICHARDS ASSISTS FORMER ASTRONAUT BEN GRIMM IN THE CHARTING OF A NIGH UNBELIEVABLE COURSE.
THE THING TAKES QUICKLY TO THE JOB... IT HAS BEEN TOO LONG SINCE HE WAS CALLED UPON TO USE HIS MIND RATHER THAN HIS MUSCLE.
AND, ON THE OUTSKIRTS OF ATTILAN, GORGON AND KARNAK SCOUT THE FLAWLESS SURFACE OF THE ALMOST INDESTRUCTABLE PLASTEEL WHICH BONDS THE CITY IN PLACE.
THERE!
KARNAK'S COMPUTER-LIKE MIND SCANS THE SELECTED SPOT, KEEN EYES READING SIGNS BEYOND HUMAN COMPREHENSION.
THIS IS THE PLACE. THE WEAKEST POINT IS NEAR HERE...
BE CAREFUL, SMALL ONE. YOU ARE STILL WEAK.
LIKE A DIAMOND-CUTTER, KARNAK PROBES, FINDING IN ALL THE SEEMING PERFECTION THAT ONE FLAW, THAT ONE TARGET FOR HIS BLOW...
DO NOT DISTRESS YOURSELF, MY COUSIN.
HE STRIKES...
KRAK
KARNAK HAS NO NEED OF STRENGTH, ONLY PRECISION.

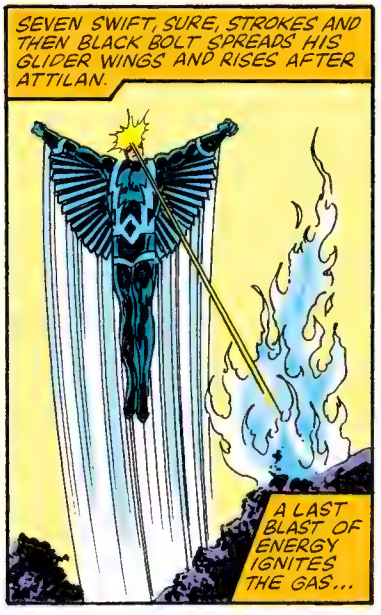

WITH, UNFORTUNATELY, MINIMAL EFFECT.
A WORTHY TRY, MY FRIEND. BUT FOR SOME TASKS ONLY BRUTE FORCE IS SUFFICIENT.
BRUTE FORCE SUCH AS GORGON COMMANDS.
THEN STRIKE THERE, COUSIN. LET YOUR THUNDEROUS HOOF COMPLETE WHAT I HAVE BEGUN.
THE ECHOES OF THE MIGHTY BLOW RESOUND THROUGH THE MISTY VALLEYS...
AND THE JOB IS DONE!
PERFECT! THE FISSURE HAS CIRCLED THE CITY. NOW THE LAST TASK FALLS TO...
"... BLACK BOLT."
IN ALMOST TOTAL DARKNESS THE KING OF THE INHUMANS MOVES SLOWLY.
HE IS FAR BELOW THE BUSTLE OF ATTILAN, IN CAVERNS HEWN FROM THE VERY LIVING ROCK.
THIS IS THE MIDNIGHT REALM OF THE ALPHA-PRIMITIVES, SUB-HUMAN WORKERS OF THE GREAT REFUGE.
BLACK BOLT LOOKS UPON THESE LOWEST OF HIS SUBJECTS AND SENSES THE FEAR AND HATRED HIS PRESENCE STIRS IN THEM.
ONCE, NOT LONG AGO, THE INHUMANS FREED THEIR MINDLESS DRONES. IT WAS A NOBLE EXPERIMENT.
AND A FAILURE.

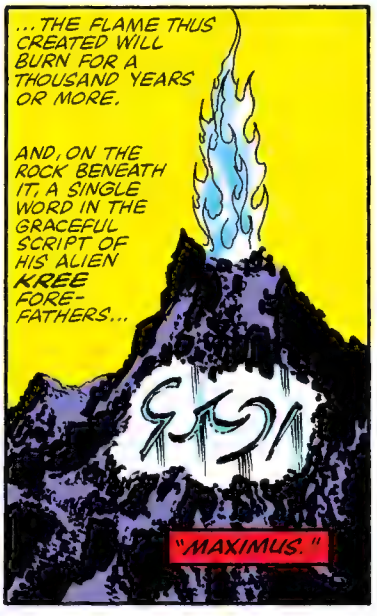

BEFORE THE INHUMANS REALIZED THEIR MISTAKE MANY HUNDREDS OF THE ALPHAS DIED, OF ILLNESS OR STARVATION, UNABLE TO FEND FOR THEMSELVES IN THEIR SUBTERRANEAN WORLD. WHEN THE ROYAL FAMILY AT LAST VENTURED AGAIN INTO THE CATACOMBS IT WAS ALMOST TOO LATE. THE ALPHAS HAD PAID THE PRICE FOR MISGUIDED ALTRUISM.
NOW BLACK BOLT FACES THEIR HORDES ALONE AND UNAFRAID.
AT LENGTH EVEN THE PRIMITIVES RECOGNIZE THE POWER OF HIS NOBILITY AND PURPOSE.
WHEN HE POINTS THEM TO THE PASSAGES LEADING TO THE SURFACE, THEY GO. THEY GRUMBLE WORDLESSLY IN THEIR LESS-THAN-HUMAN VOICES, BUT THEY GO.
BLACK BOLT LISTENS AS THE MURMER OF THEIR PASSING FADES. SILENCE ROLLS HEAVILY ACROSS HIM.
HE LISTENS, HEARING THE THUMP OF HIS OWN HEARTBEAT GROW LOUD IN THE DARKNESS.
HE COUNTS, 998, 999, ONE THOUSAND PULSES. ALL SHOULD BE IN READINESS ABOVE.
AND THEN...
BLACK BOLT SPEAKS!
AND A SONIC SHOCK WAVE LASHES OUT, SMASHING THE SOLID ROCK BEFORE IT AS THOUGH IT WERE A CHILD'S TOY OF SAND AND WATER.
ATTILAN BREAKS FREE!*
*WE'RE NOT GOING TO INSULT YOUR INTELLIGENCE BY PLACING A SOUND-EFFECT IN THIS PANEL. BELIEVE US, NO MERE WORDS COULD CONVEY THE AWE-SOME NOISE OF BLACK BOLT'S SINGLE SYLLABLE! --JOHN AND JIM.

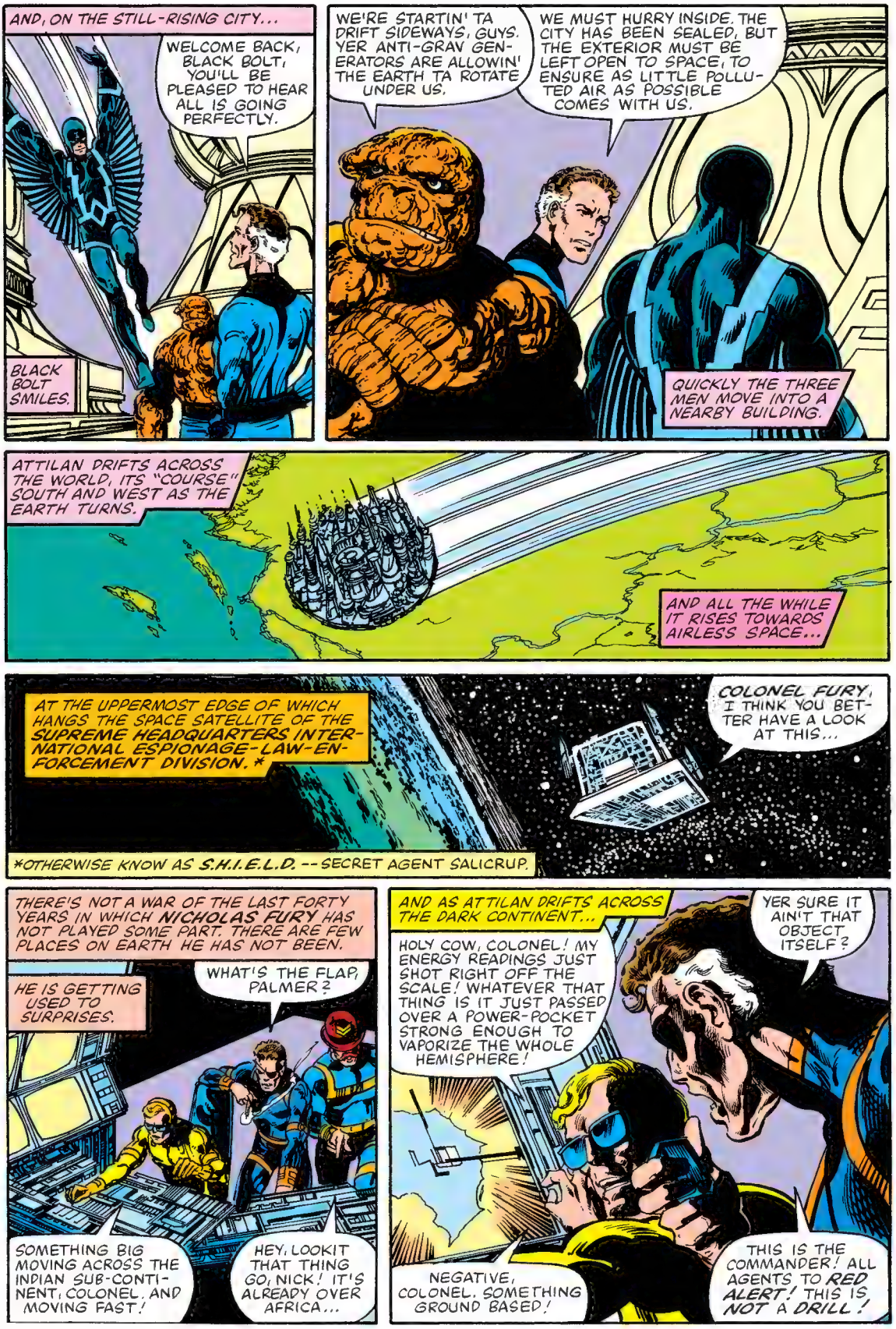

LIKE SOME GREAT WINGED INSECT FREEING ITSELF FROM A COCOON THE CITY OF THE INHUMANS RISES PONDEROUSLY AGAINST THE TUG OF GRAVITY.
INCH BY INCH IT LIFTS FROM THE ROCKY DECLINE SCOOPED OUT FOR IT SO LONG AGO BY BLACK BOLT AND SOME VERY SPECIAL FRIENDS.
GLEAMING IN THE BRIGHT HIMALAYAN DAWN, THE GREAT REFUGE SHOWS LITTLE SIGN OF THE DEVASTATION IT HAS SUFFERED.

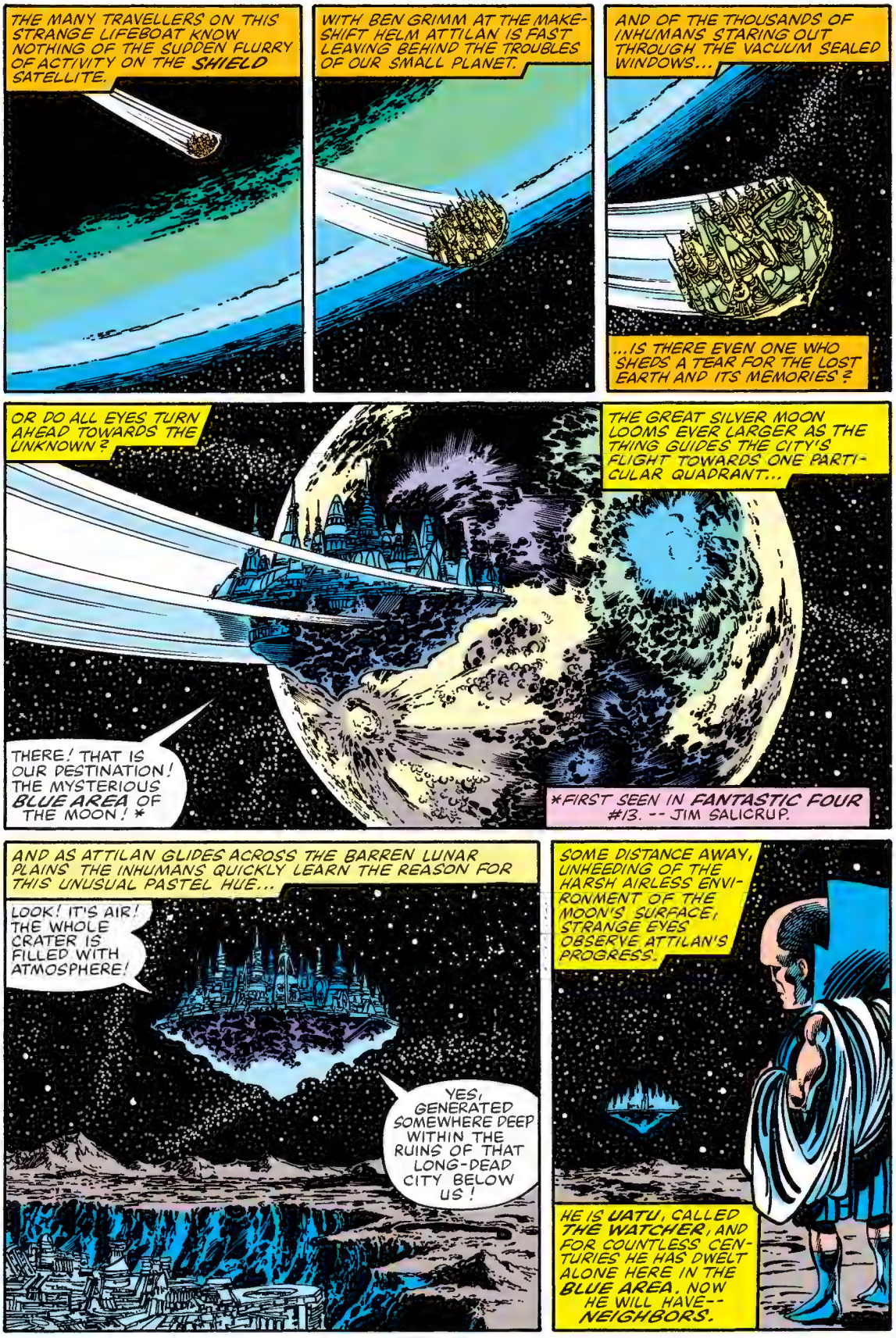

AND DEEP WITHIN THAT NOW EMPTY HOLLOW BLACK BOLT SURVEYS THE FORMER HOME OF HIS PEOPLE.
AS HE STANDS IN ONCE-MORE-CHARACTERISTIC SILENCE THE HISS OF ESCAPING NATURAL GAS CATCHES HIS EAR.


HE SEEMS FOR A MOMENT TO PAUSE IN CONTEMPLATION...
THEN, STRAIGHT AND TRUE AS A LASER THE ELECTRON STREAM FLASHES FROM HIS ANTENNAE, GOUGING THE ROCK BELOW THE VENT.

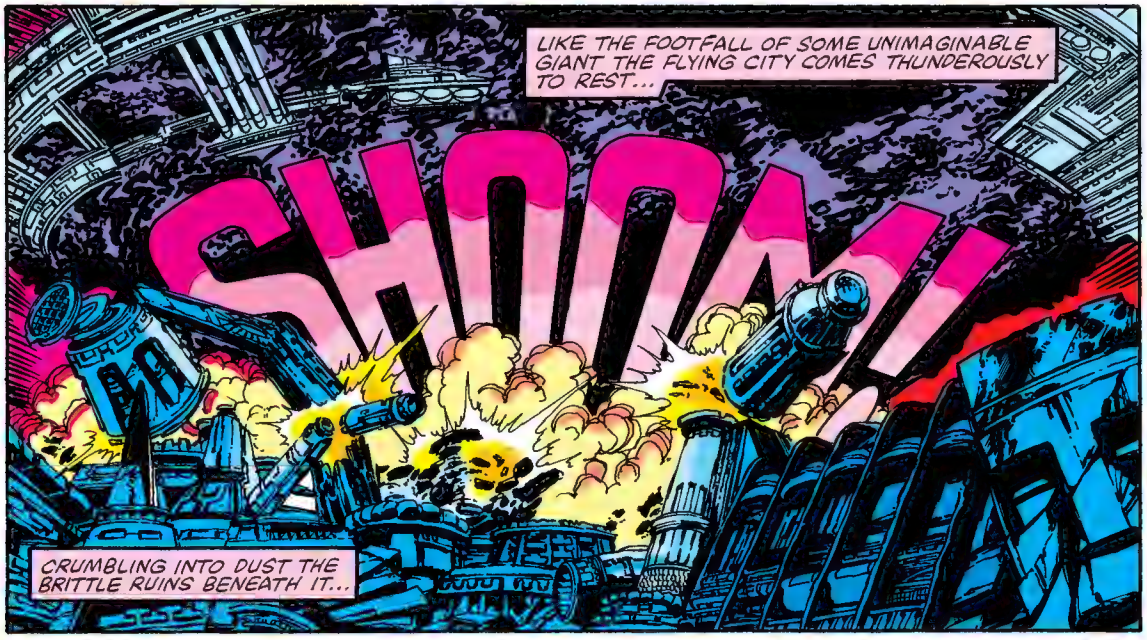

SEVEN SWIFT, SURE, STROKES AND THEN BLACK BOLT SPREADS HIS GLIDER WINGS AND RISES AFTER ATTILAN.
A LAST BLAST OF ENERGY IGNITES THE GAS...


...THE FLAME THUS CREATED WILL BURN FOR A THOUSAND YEARS OR MORE.
AND, ON THE ROCK BENEATH IT, A SINGLE WORD IN THE GRACEFUL SCRIPT OF HIS ALIEN KREE FORE-FATHERS...
"MAXIMUS."

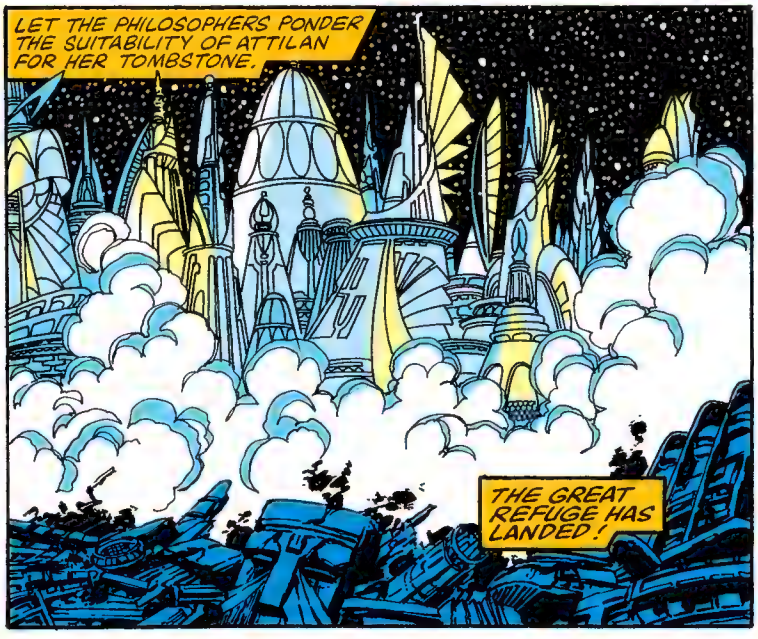

AND, ON THE STILL-RISING CITY...
WELCOME BACK, BLACK BOLT, YOU'LL BE PLEASED TO HEAR ALL IS GOING PERFECTLY.
BLACK BOLT SMILES.
WE'RE STARTIN' TA DRIFT SIDEWAYS, GUYS. YER ANTI-GRAV GENERATORS ARE ALLOWIN' THE EARTH TA ROTATE UNDER US.
WE MUST HURRY INSIDE. THE CITY HAS BEEN SEALED, BUT THE EXTERIOR MUST BE LEFT OPEN TO SPACE, TO ENSURE AS LITTLE POLLUTED AIR AS POSSIBLE COMES WITH US.
QUICKLY THE THREE MEN MOVE INTO A NEARBY BUILDING.
ATTILAN DRIFTS ACROSS THE WORLD, ITS "COURSE" SOUTH AND WEST AS THE EARTH TURNS.
AND ALL THE WHILE IT RISES TOWARDS AIRLESS SPACE...
AT THE UPPERMOST EDGE OF WHICH HANGS THE SPACE SATELLITE OF THE SUPREME HEADQUARTERS INTERNATIONAL ESPIONAGE-LAW-ENFORCEMENT DIVISION. *
COLONEL FURY, I THINK YOU BETTER HAVE A LOOK AT THIS...
*OTHERWISE KNOW AS S.H.I.E.L.D. -- SECRET AGENT SALICRUP.
THERE'S NOT A WAR OF THE LAST FORTY YEARS IN WHICH NICHOLAS FURY HAS NOT PLAYED SOME PART. THERE ARE FEW PLACES ON EARTH HE HAS NOT BEEN.
HE IS GETTING USED TO SURPRISES.
WHAT'S THE FLAP, PALMER?
SOMETHING BIG MOVING ACROSS THE INDIAN SUB-CONTINENT, COLONEL, AND MOVING FAST!
HEY, LOOKIT THAT THING GO, NICK! IT'S ALREADY OVER AFRICA...
AND AS ATTILAN DRIFTS ACROSS THE DARK CONTINENT...
HOLY COW, COLONEL! MY ENERGY READINGS JUST SHOT RIGHT OFF THE SCALE! WHATEVER THAT THING IS IT JUST PASSED OVER A POWER-POCKET STRONG ENOUGH TO VAPORIZE THE WHOLE HEMISPHERE!
YER SURE IT AIN'T THAT OBJECT ITSELF?
NEGATIVE, COLONEL. SOMETHING GROUND BASED!
THIS IS THE COMMANDER! ALL AGENTS TO RED ALERT! THIS IS NOT A DRILL!


THE MANY TRAVELLERS ON THIS STRANGE LIFEBOAT KNOW NOTHING OF THE SUDDEN FLURRY OF ACTIVITY ON THE SHIELD SATELLITE.
WITH BEN GRIMM AT THE MAKE-SHIFT HELM ATTILAN IS FAST LEAVING BEHIND THE TROUBLES OF OUR SMALL PLANET.
AND OF THE THOUSANDS OF INHUMANS STARING OUT THROUGH THE VACUUM SEALED WINDOWS...
...IS THERE EVEN ONE WHO SHEDS A TEAR FOR THE LOST EARTH AND ITS MEMORIES?
OR DO ALL EYES TURN AHEAD TOWARDS THE UNKNOWN?
THE GREAT SILVER MOON LOOMS EVER LARGER AS THE THING GUIDES THE CITY'S FLIGHT TOWARDS ONE PARTICULAR QUADRANT...
THERE! THAT IS OUR DESTINATION! THE MYSTERIOUS BLUE AREA OF THE MOON! *
*FIRST SEEN IN FANTASTIC FOUR #13. -- JIM SALICRUP.
AND AS ATTILAN GLIDES ACROSS THE BARREN LUNAR PLAINS THE INHUMANS QUICKLY LEARN THE REASON FOR THIS UNUSUAL PASTEL HUE...
LOOK! IT'S AIR! THE WHOLE CRATER IS FILLED WITH ATMOSPHERE!
YES, GENERATED SOMEWHERE DEEP WITHIN THE RUINS OF THAT LONG-DEAD CITY BELOW US!
SOME DISTANCE AWAY, UNHEEDING OF THE HARSH AIRLESS ENVIRONMENT OF THE MOON'S SURFACE, STRANGE EYES OBSERVE ATTILAN'S PROGRESS.
HE IS UATU, CALLED THE WATCHER, AND FOR COUNTLESS CENTURIES HE HAS DWELT ALONE HERE IN THE BLUE AREA. NOW HE WILL HAVE-- NEIGHBORS.

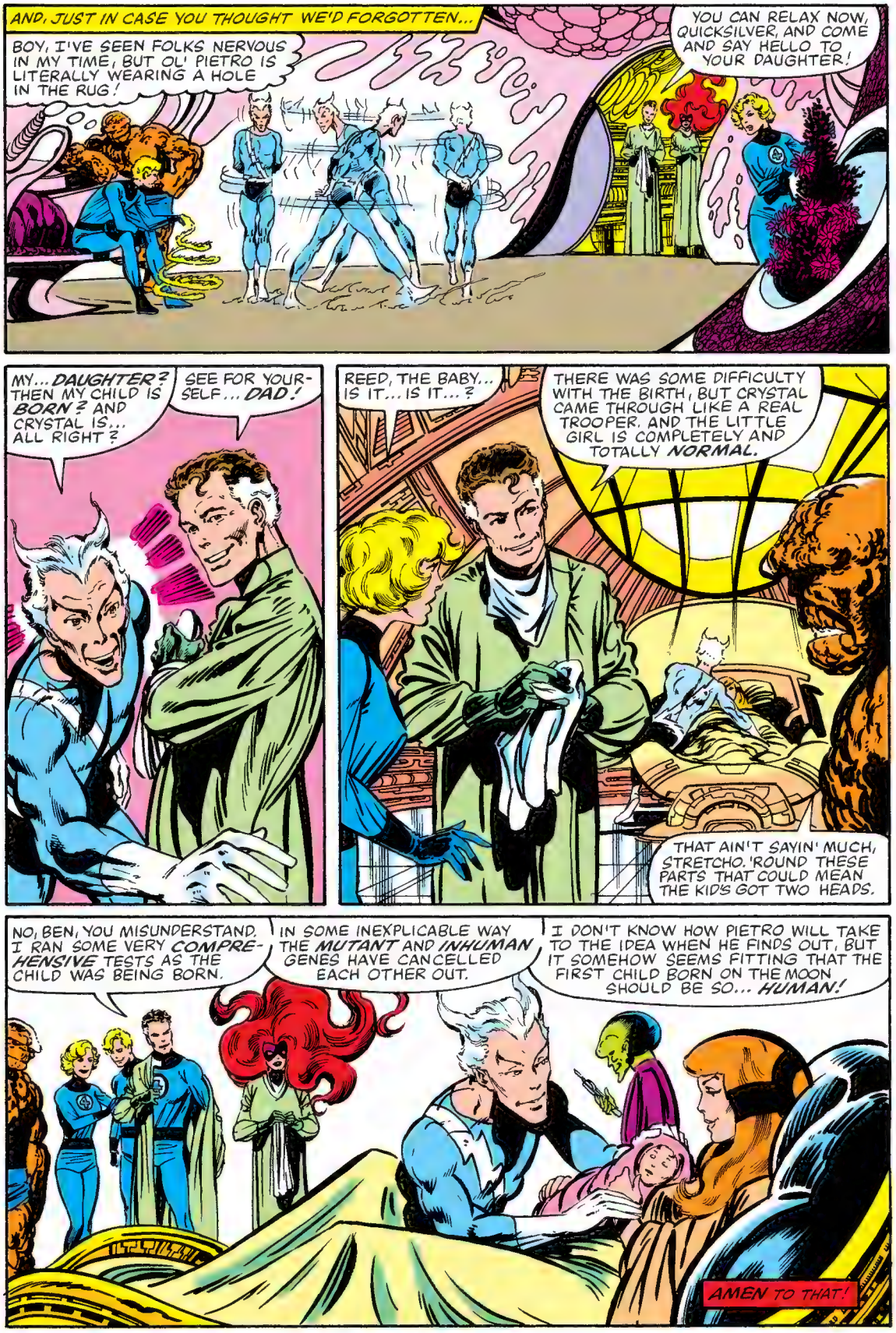
BUT OUR THOUGHTS MUST TURN ELSEWHERE...
STEADY, BEN. COMPENSATE FOR LATERAL DRIFT. WE'RE SLIDING TO ONE SIDE. IF WE COME DOWN AT AN ANGLE...
DON'T GET YER TRUSS IN A KNOT, BIG BRAIN. THIS THING HANDLES LIKE A WET SPONGE, BUT I'VE FLOWN WORSE!


LIKE THE FOOTFALL OF SOME UNIMAGINABLE GIANT THE FLYING CITY COMES THUNDEROUSLY TO REST...
SHOOM!
CRUMBLING INTO DUST THE BRITTLE RUINS BENEATH IT...

AND BURYING FOR ALL TIME THE FATEFUL SPOT UPON WHICH A YOUNG WOMAN FROM EARTH ONCE DIED TO SAVE A UNIVERSE!*
*SEE X-MEN #137. -- SALICRUP.


LET THE PHILOSOPHERS PONDER THE SUITABILITY OF ATTILAN FOR HER TOMBSTONE.
THE GREAT REFUGE HAS LANDED!

THERE IS A LONG SILENCE, BROKEN ONLY HERE AND THERE BY THE DISTANT CRUNCH OF STONE SHIFTING UNDER THE PRESS OF THE CITY.
THEN, SLOWLY AT FIRST, A MURMUR RISES, A SOFT BURBLE OF VOICES THAT GROWS STEADILY STRONGER AS, FROM EVERY DOORWAY IN VAST ATTILAN FLOWS A FLOOD OF LIFE!
THE INHUMANS COME FORTH TO GREET THEIR NEW WORLD!


AND, JUST IN CASE YOU THOUGHT WE'D FORGOTTEN...
BOY, I'VE SEEN FOLKS NERVOUS IN MY TIME, BUT OL' PIETRO IS LITERALLY WEARING A HOLE IN THE RUG!
YOU CAN RELAX NOW, QUICKSILVER, AND COME AND SAY HELLO TO YOUR DAUGHTER!
MY... DAUGHTER? THEN MY CHILD IS BORN? AND CRYSTAL IS... ALL RIGHT?
SEE FOR YOURSELF... DAD!
REED, THE BABY... IS IT... IS IT...?
THERE WAS SOME DIFFICULTY WITH THE BIRTH, BUT CRYSTAL CAME THROUGH LIKE A REAL TROOPER. AND THE LITTLE GIRL IS COMPLETELY AND TOTALLY NORMAL.
THAT AIN'T SAYIN' MUCH, STRETCHO. 'ROUND THESE PARTS THAT COULD MEAN THE KID'S GOT TWO HEADS.
NO, BEN, YOU MISUNDERSTAND. I RAN SOME VERY COMPREHENSIVE TESTS AS THE CHILD WAS BEING BORN.
IN SOME INEXPLICABLE WAY THE MUTANT AND INHUMAN GENES HAVE CANCELLED EACH OTHER OUT.
I DON'T KNOW HOW PIETRO WILL TAKE TO THE IDEA WHEN HE FINDS OUT, BUT IT SOMEHOW SEEMS FITTING THAT THE FIRST CHILD BORN ON THE MOON SHOULD BE SO... HUMAN!
AMEN TO THAT!

As part of the Fantastic Four 20th anniversary celebration, Marvel editor-in-chief Jim Shooter tapped ace cartoonist and fan-favorite Fred Hembeck (aided and abetted by Marvel's top artists) to roast the Fantastic Four!

Fantastic Four Roast #1, May 1982
"When Titans Chuckle!"

Writer & Layouts: Fred Hembeck

Pencilers: Fred Hembeck (pages 278-280, 284, 286-289, 292, 296, 299, 301, 309-313)
Ron Wilson (pages 281, 284)
John Byrne (pages 282, 286, 288, 297, 306, 307, 311)
Michael Golden (pages 283, 308)
John Romita Jr. (pages 285, 307)
Al Milgrom (pages 287, 310)
Mike Zeck (pages 289, 306)
Bob Layton (pages 290, 306)
Alan Weiss (pages 291, 307)
Sal Buscema (pages 292, 306)
Mike Vosburg (pages 293, 306)
Kerry Gammill (pages 294, 306)
Bob Hall (pages 295, 306, 307)
Keith Pollard (pages 296, 307)
Frank Miller (pages 298, 306)
Denys Cowan (page 299)
Marshall Rogers (pages 300, 307)
John Buscema (pages 301, 305)
Don Perlin (pages 302, 306, 307)
Gene Day (pages 303, 307)
Walter Simonson (page 304)
Frank Springer (page 306)
Dave Cockrum (page 307)
Steve Leialoha (page 307)
Bill Sienkiewicz (pages 307, 309)
Brent Anderson (pages 307, 312)

Inkers: Terry Austin (pages 278-279, 282, 293, 300, 307)
Fred Hembeck (pages 280, 284, 286-289, 292, 296, 299, 301, 309-313)
Chic Stone (pages 281, 284)
Michael Golden (pages 283, 308)
John Romita Jr. (pages 285, 307)
Josef Rubinstein (page 286, 299)
Al Milgrom (pages 287, 310)
Joe Sinnott (pages 288, 297, 305-307)
John Beatty (pages 289, 306)
Bob Layton (pages 290, 306)
Alan Weiss (pages 291, 307)
Sal Buscema (pages 292, 306)
Ricardo Villamonte (pages 294, 306)
Dan Green (page 295)
Keith Pollard (pages 296, 307)
Klaus Janson (pages 298, 306)
Bob McLeod (page 301)
Don Perlin (pages 302, 306)
Gene Day (pages 303, 307)
Walter Simonson (page 304)
John Byrne (pages 306, 307, 311)
Frank Springer (page 306)
Dave Cockrum (page 307)
Steve Leialoha (page 307)
Bill Sienkiewicz (pages 307, 309)
Brent Anderson (pages 307, 312)

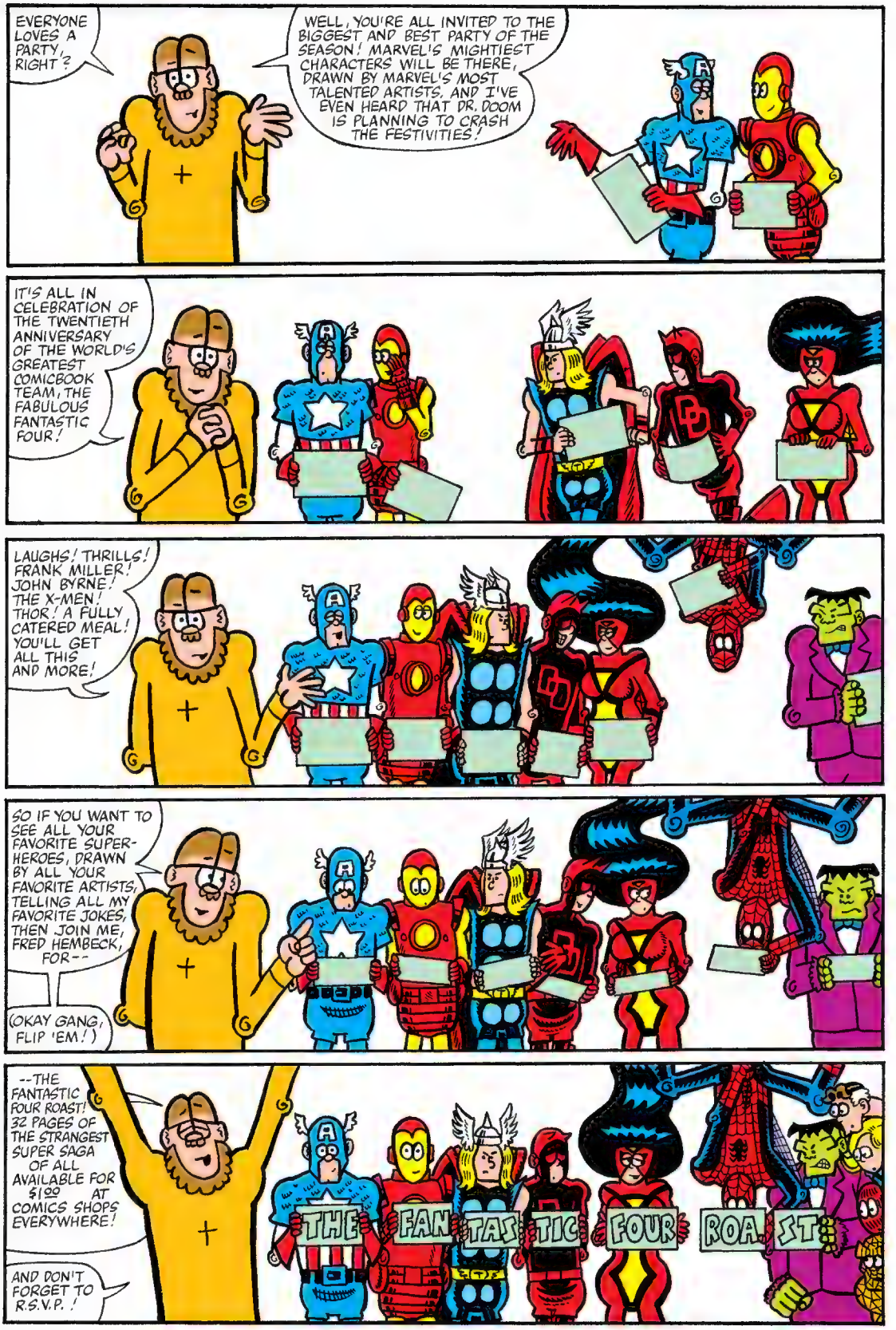
Letterer: Joe Rosen

Colorists: Glynis Wein & Andy Yanchus

Editor & Plot Assist: Jim Shooter

Art & Color Reconstruction: All Thumbs Creative

Fantastic Four Roast #1 house ad from May 1982 titles


EVERYONE LOVES A PARTY, RIGHT?
WELL, YOU'RE ALL INVITED TO THE BIGGEST AND BEST PARTY OF THE SEASON! MARVEL'S MIGHTIEST CHARACTERS WILL BE THERE, DRAWN BY MARVEL'S MOST TALENTED ARTISTS, AND I'VE EVEN HEARD THAT DR. DOOM IS PLANNING TO CRASH THE FESTIVITIES!
IT'S ALL IN CELEBRATION OF THE TWENTIETH ANNIVERSARY OF THE WORLD'S GREATEST COMICBOOK TEAM, THE FABULOUS FANTASTIC FOUR!
LAUGHS! THRILLS! FRANK MILLER! JOHN BYRNE! THE X-MEN! THOR! A FULLY CATERED MEAL! YOU'LL GET ALL THIS AND MORE!
SO IF YOU WANT TO SEE ALL YOUR FAVORITE SUPER-HEROES, DRAWN BY ALL YOUR FAVORITE ARTISTS, TELLING ALL MY FAVORITE JOKES, THEN JOIN ME, FRED HEMBECK, FOR--
(OKAY GANG, FLIP 'EM!)
--THE FANTASTIC FOUR ROAST! 32 PAGES OF THE STRANGEST SUPER SAGA OF ALL AVAILABLE FOR $1.00 AT COMICS SHOPS EVERYWHERE!
AND DON'T FORGET TO R.S.V.P.!
THE FANTASTIC FOUR ROAST
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Fantastic Four® Roast

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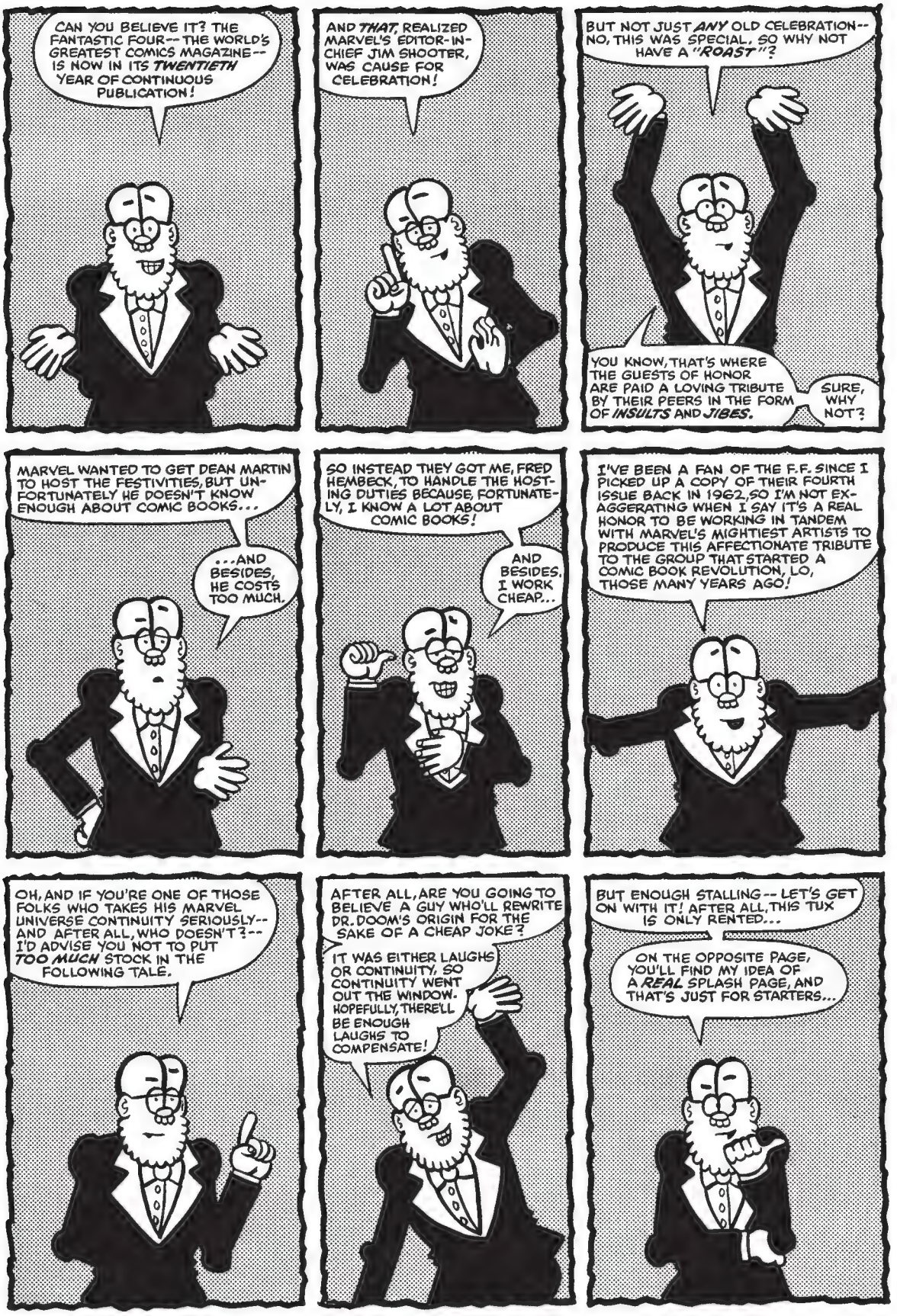
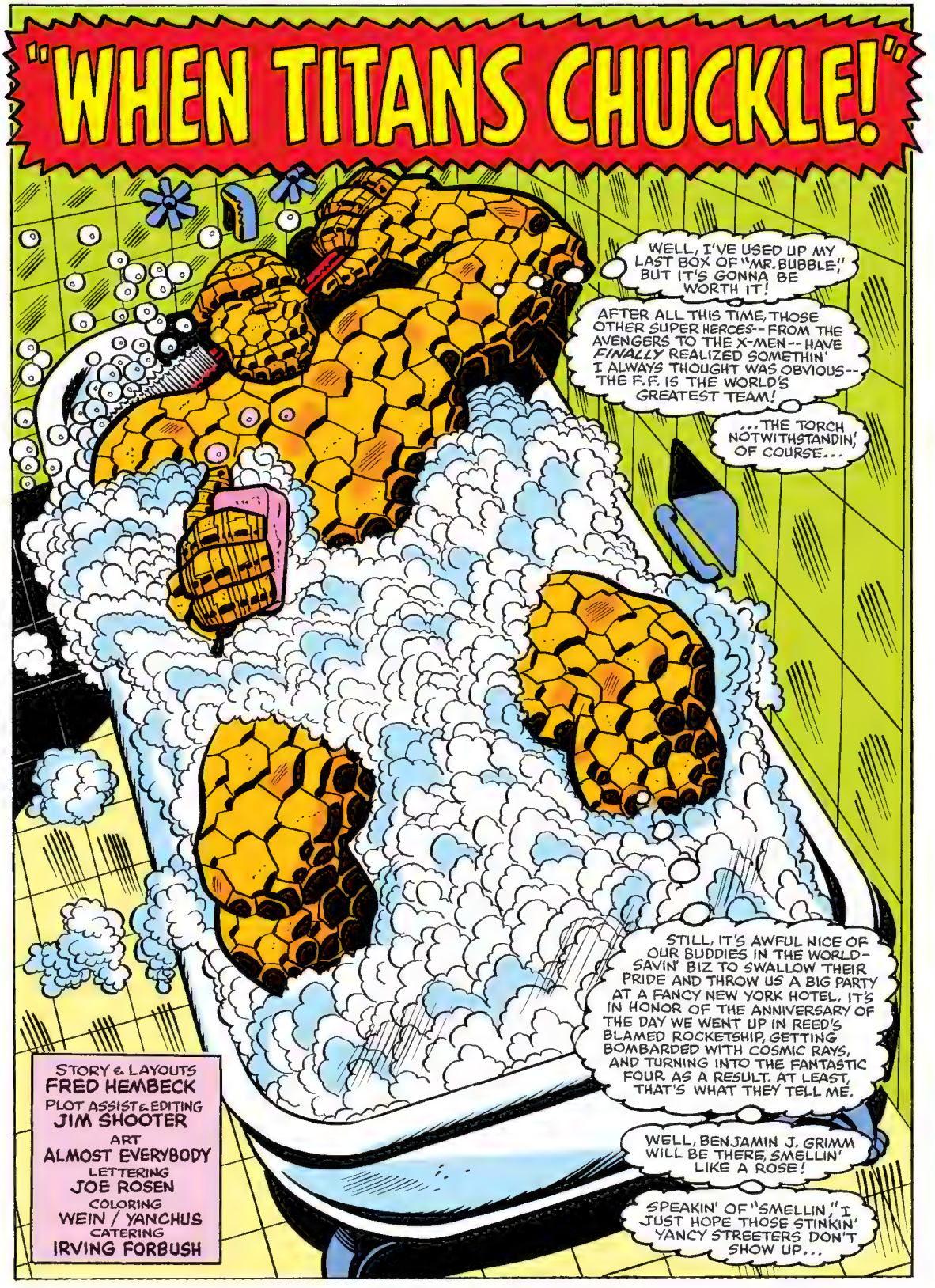
WHO IS THE MYSTERIOUS PARTY POOPER?

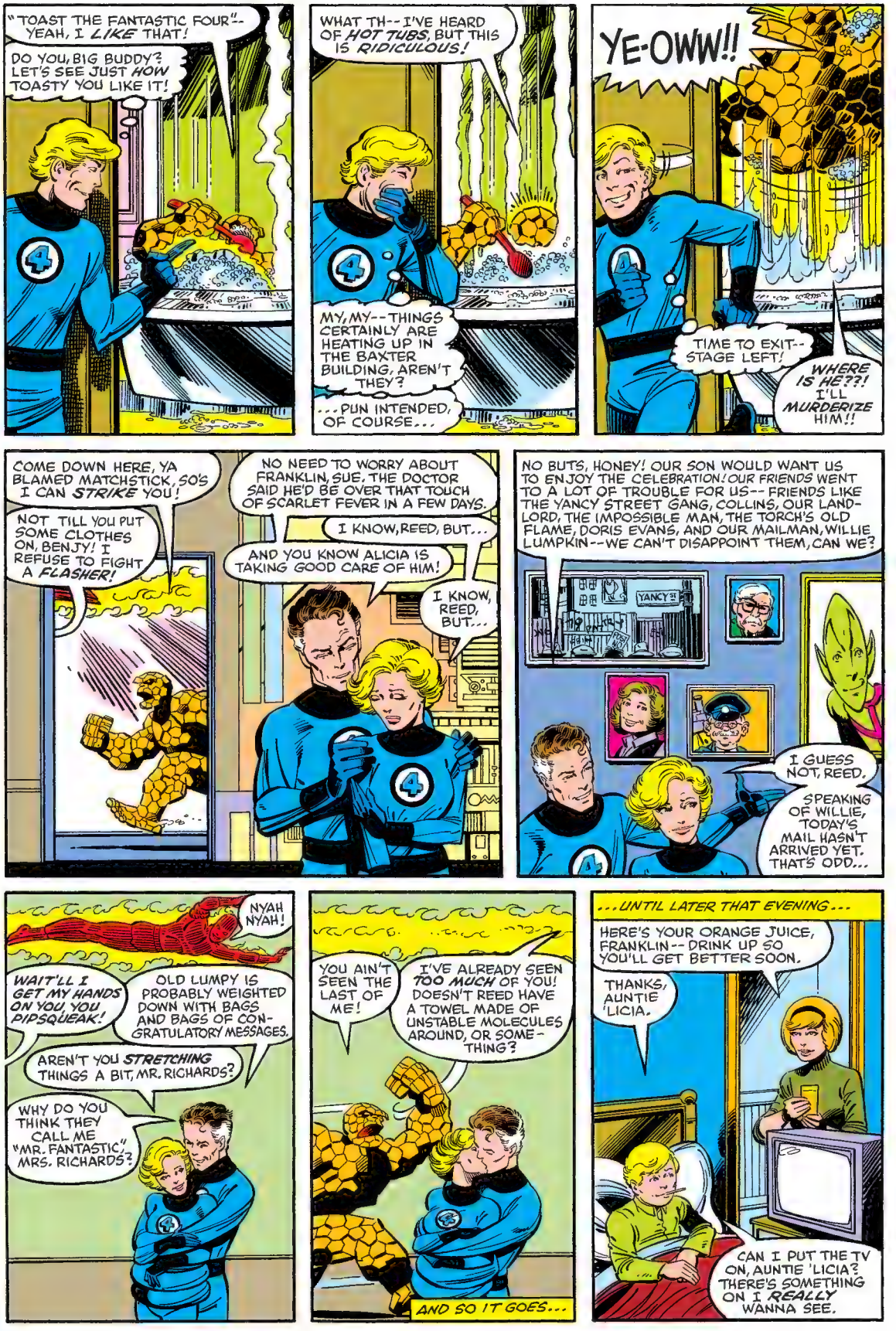
WELCOME TO THE PARTY!

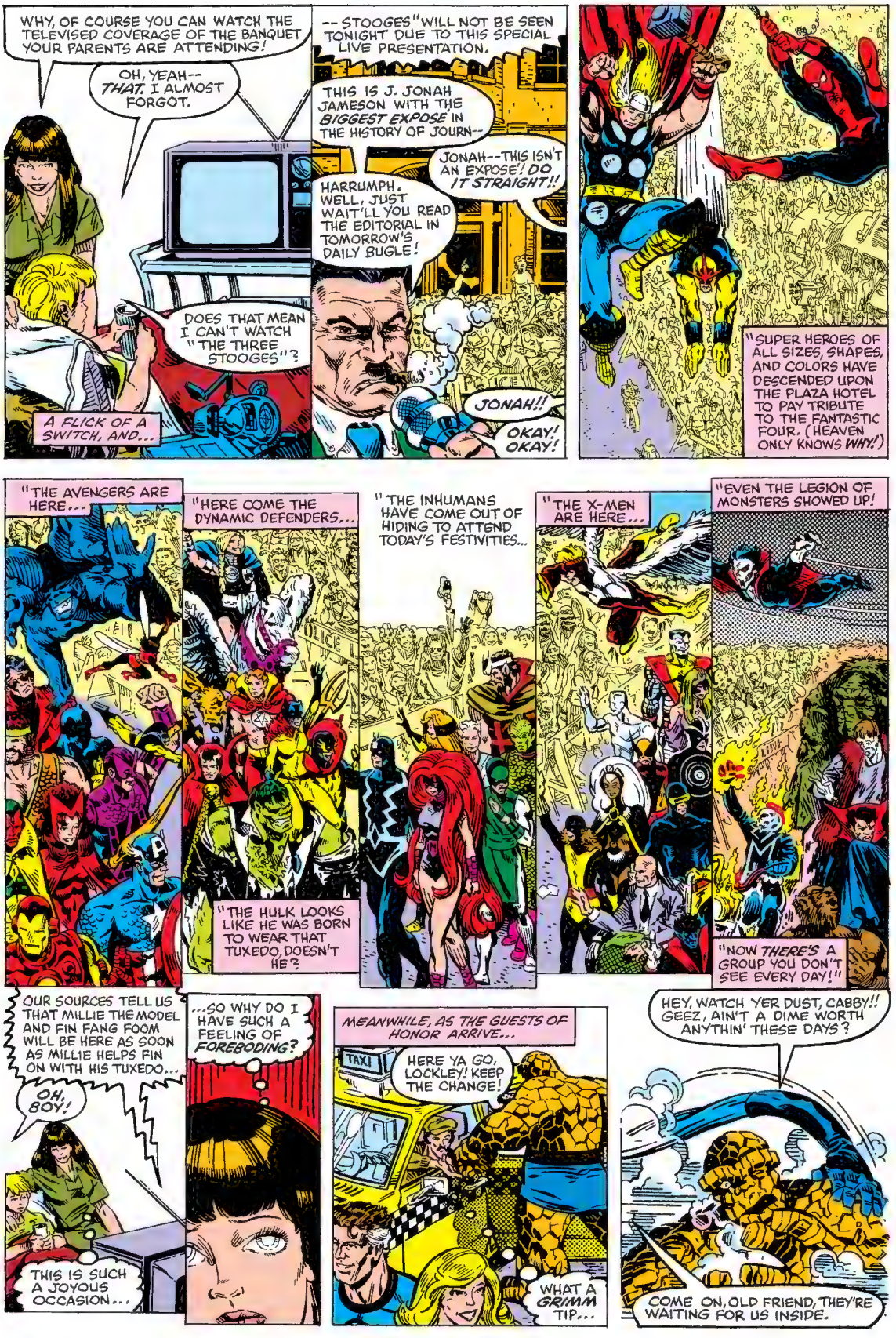
ZZZZZ

HEMBECK-austin

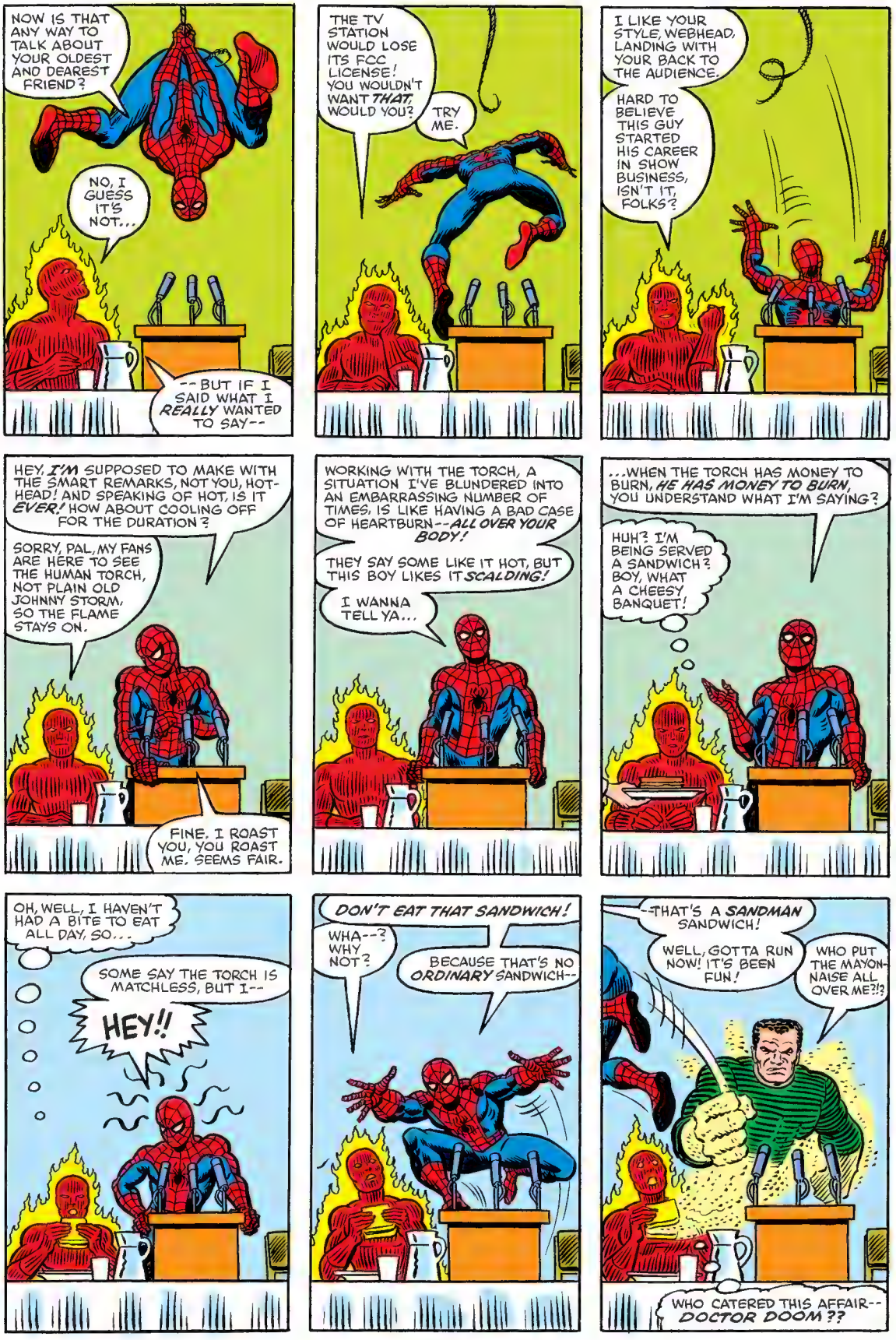

CAN YOU BELIEVE IT? THE FANTASTIC FOUR -- THE WORLD'S GREATEST COMICS MAGAZINE -- IS NOW IN ITS TWENTIETH YEAR OF CONTINUOUS PUBLICATION!
AND THAT, REALIZED MARVEL'S EDITOR-IN-CHIEF JIM SHOOTER, WAS CAUSE FOR CELEBRATION!
BUT NOT JUST ANY OLD CELEBRATION -- NO, THIS WAS SPECIAL, SO WHY NOT HAVE A "ROAST"?
YOU KNOW, THAT'S WHERE THE GUESTS OF HONOR ARE PAID A LOVING TRIBUTE BY THEIR PEERS IN THE FORM OF INSULTS AND JIBES.
SURE, WHY NOT?
MARVEL WANTED TO GET DEAN MARTIN TO HOST THE FESTIVITIES, BUT UNFORTUNATELY HE DOESN'T KNOW ENOUGH ABOUT COMIC BOOKS...
...AND BESIDES, HE COSTS TOO MUCH.
SO INSTEAD THEY GOT ME, FRED HEMBECK, TO HANDLE THE HOSTING DUTIES BECAUSE, FORTUNATELY, I KNOW A LOT ABOUT COMIC BOOKS!
AND BESIDES, I WORK CHEAP...
I'VE BEEN A FAN OF THE F.F. SINCE I PICKED UP A COPY OF THEIR FOURTH ISSUE BACK IN 1962, SO I'M NOT EXAGGERATING WHEN I SAY IT'S A REAL HONOR TO BE WORKING IN TANDEM WITH MARVEL'S MIGHTIEST ARTISTS TO PRODUCE THIS AFFECTIONATE TRIBUTE TO THE GROUP THAT STARTED A COMIC BOOK REVOLUTION, LO, THOSE MANY YEARS AGO!
OH, AND IF YOU'RE ONE OF THOSE FOLKS WHO TAKES HIS MARVEL UNIVERSE CONTINUITY SERIOUSLY -- AND AFTER ALL, WHO DOESN'T? -- I'D ADVISE YOU NOT TO PUT TOO MUCH STOCK IN THE FOLLOWING TALE.
AFTER ALL, ARE YOU GOING TO BELIEVE A GUY WHO'LL REWRITE DR. DOOM'S ORIGIN FOR THE SAKE OF A CHEAP JOKE?
IT WAS EITHER LAUGHS OR CONTINUITY, SO CONTINUITY WENT OUT THE WINDOW. HOPEFULLY, THERE'LL BE ENOUGH LAUGHS TO COMPENSATE!
BUT ENOUGH STALLING -- LET'S GET ON WITH IT! AFTER ALL, THIS TUX IS ONLY RENTED...
ON THE OPPOSITE PAGE, YOU'LL FIND MY IDEA OF A REAL SPLASH PAGE, AND THAT'S JUST FOR STARTERS...

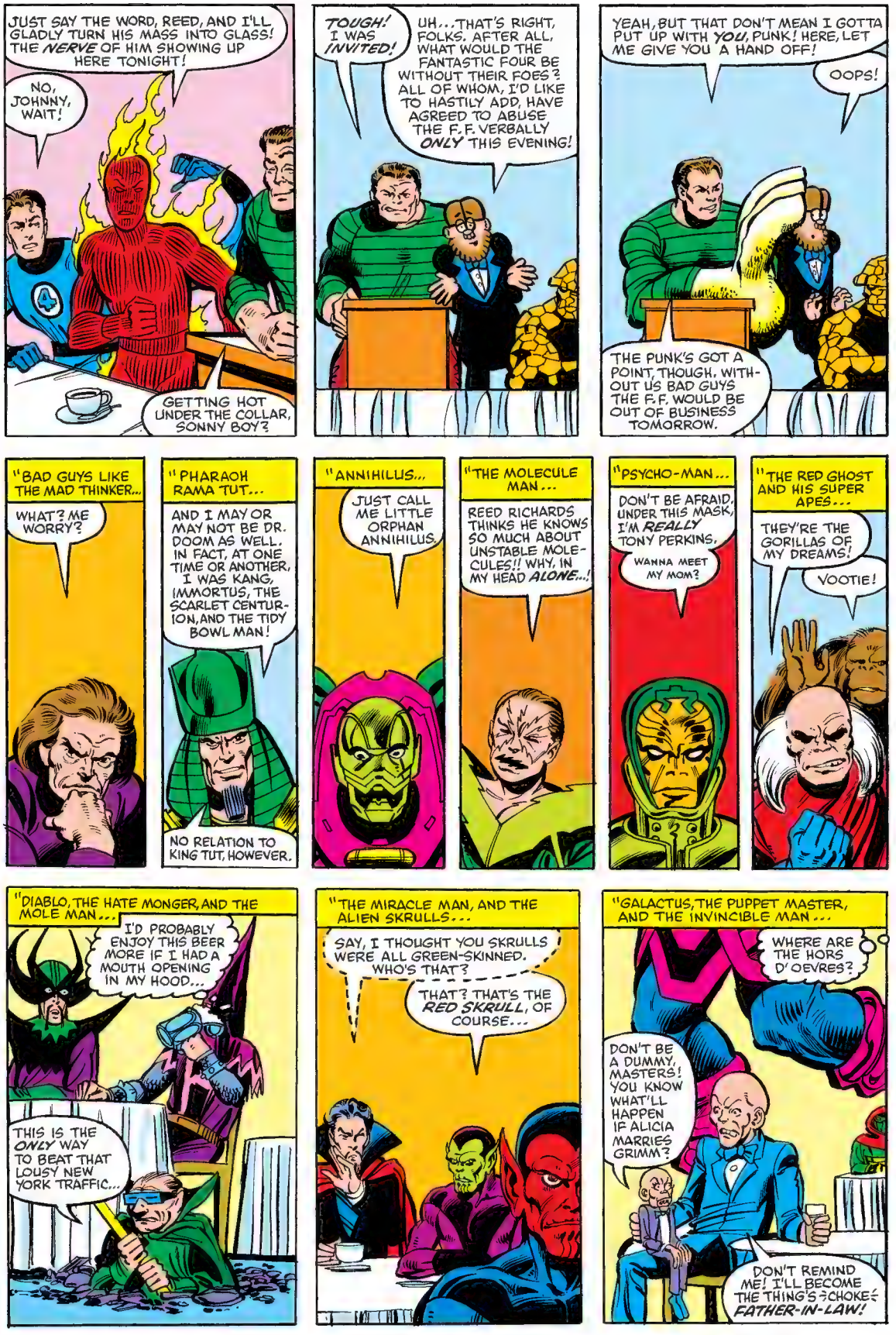

"WHEN TITANS CHUCKLE!"
WELL, I'VE USED UP MY LAST BOX OF "MR. BUBBLE," BUT IT'S GONNA BE WORTH IT!
AFTER ALL THIS TIME, THOSE OTHER SUPER HEROES--FROM THE AVENGERS TO THE X-MEN--HAVE FINALLY REALIZED SOMETHIN' I ALWAYS THOUGHT WAS OBVIOUS--THE F.F. IS THE WORLD'S GREATEST TEAM!
...THE TORCH NOTWITHSTANDIN', OF COURSE...
STILL, IT'S AWFUL NICE OF OUR BUDDIES IN THE WORLD-SAVIN' BIZ TO SWALLOW THEIR PRIDE AND THROW US A BIG PARTY AT A FANCY NEW YORK HOTEL. IT'S IN HONOR OF THE ANNIVERSARY OF THE DAY WE WENT UP IN REED'S BLAMED ROCKETSHIP, GETTING BOMBARDED WITH COSMIC RAYS, AND TURNING INTO THE FANTASTIC FOUR AS A RESULT. AT LEAST, THAT'S WHAT THEY TELL ME.
WELL, BENJAMIN J. GRIMM WILL BE THERE, SMELLIN' LIKE A ROSE!
SPEAKIN' OF "SMELLIN'," I JUST HOPE THOSE STINKIN' YANCY STREETERS DON'T SHOW UP...
STORY & LAYOUTS
FRED HEMBECK
PLOT ASSIST & EDITING
JIM SHOOTER
ART
ALMOST EVERYBODY
LETTERING
JOE ROSEN
COLORING
WEIN / YANCHUS
CATERING
IRVING FORBUSH


"TOAST THE FANTASTIC FOUR"--YEAH, I LIKE THAT!
DO YOU, BIG BUDDY? LET'S SEE JUST HOW TOASTY YOU LIKE IT!
WHAT TH--I'VE HEARD OF HOT TUBS, BUT THIS IS RIDICULOUS!
MY, MY--THINGS CERTAINLY ARE HEATING UP IN THE BAXTER BUILDING, AREN'T THEY?
...PUN INTENDED, OF COURSE...
YE-OWW!!
TIME TO EXIT--STAGE LEFT!
WHERE IS HE??! I'LL MURDERIZE HIM!!
COME DOWN HERE, YA BLAMED MATCHSTICK, SO'S I CAN STRIKE YOU!
NOT TILL YOU PUT SOME CLOTHES ON, BENJY! I REFUSE TO FIGHT A FLASHER!
NO NEED TO WORRY ABOUT FRANKLIN, SUE. THE DOCTOR SAID HE'D BE OVER THAT TOUCH OF SCARLET FEVER IN A FEW DAYS.
I KNOW, REED, BUT...
AND YOU KNOW ALICIA IS TAKING GOOD CARE OF HIM!
I KNOW, REED, BUT...
NO BUTS, HONEY! OUR SON WOULD WANT US TO ENJOY THE CELEBRATION! OUR FRIENDS WENT TO A LOT OF TROUBLE FOR US--FRIENDS LIKE THE YANCY STREET GANG, COLLINS, OUR LANDLORD, THE IMPOSSIBLE MAN, THE TORCH'S OLD FLAME, DORIS EVANS, AND OUR MAILMAN, WILLIE LUMPKIN--WE CAN'T DISAPPOINT THEM, CAN WE?
YANCY ST
I GUESS NOT, REED.
SPEAKING OF WILLIE, TODAY'S MAIL HASN'T ARRIVED YET. THAT'S ODD...
NYAH NYAH!
WAIT'LL I GET MY HANDS ON YOU, YOU PIPSQUEAK!
OLD LUMPY IS PROBABLY WEIGHTED DOWN WITH BAGS AND BAGS OF CONGRATULATORY MESSAGES.
AREN'T YOU STRETCHING THINGS A BIT, MR. RICHARDS?
WHY DO YOU THINK THEY CALL ME "MR. FANTASTIC", MRS. RICHARDS?
YOU AIN'T SEEN THE LAST OF ME!
I'VE ALREADY SEEN TOO MUCH OF YOU! DOESN'T REED HAVE A TOWEL MADE OF UNSTABLE MOLECULES AROUND, OR SOMETHING?
AND SO IT GOES...
...UNTIL LATER THAT EVENING...
HERE'S YOUR ORANGE JUICE, FRANKLIN--DRINK UP SO YOU'LL GET BETTER SOON.
THANKS, AUNTIE 'LICIA.
CAN I PUT THE TV ON, AUNTIE 'LICIA? THERE'S SOMETHING ON I REALLY WANNA SEE.

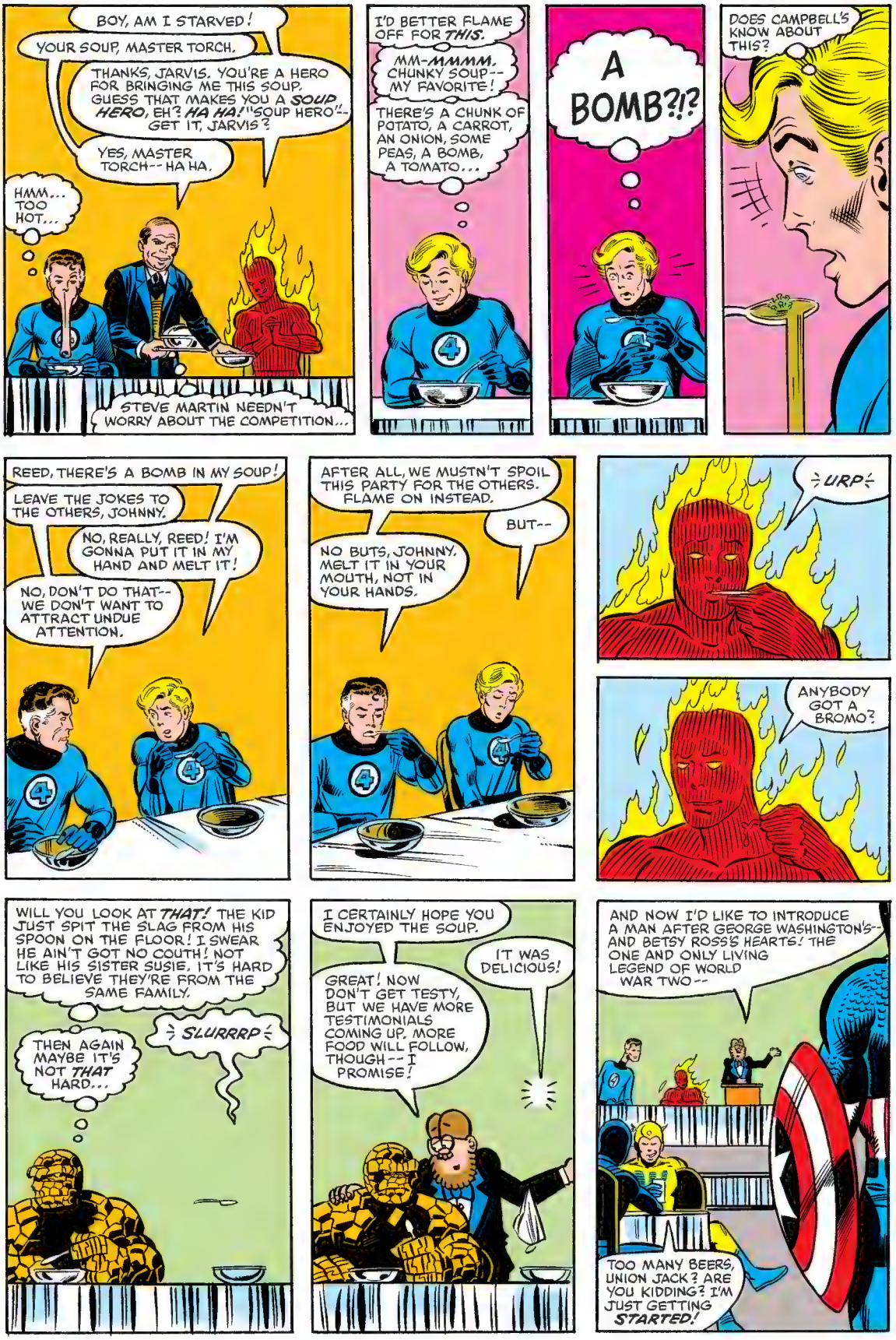

WHY, OF COURSE YOU CAN WATCH THE TELEVISED COVERAGE OF THE BANQUET YOUR PARENTS ARE ATTENDING!
OH, YEAH-- THAT, I ALMOST FORGOT.
DOES THAT MEAN I CAN'T WATCH "THE THREE STOOGES"?
A FLICK OF A SWITCH, AND...
--STOOGES" WILL NOT BE SEEN TONIGHT DUE TO THIS SPECIAL LIVE PRESENTATION.
THIS IS J. JONAH JAMESON WITH THE BIGGEST EXPOSE IN THE HISTORY OF JOURN--
JONAH--THIS ISN'T AN EXPOSE! DO IT STRAIGHT!!
HARRUMPH. WELL, JUST WAIT'LL YOU READ THE EDITORIAL IN TOMORROW'S DAILY BUGLE!
JONAH!!
OKAY! OKAY!
"SUPER HEROES OF ALL SIZES, SHAPES, AND COLORS HAVE DESCENDED UPON THE PLAZA HOTEL TO PAY TRIBUTE TO THE FANTASTIC FOUR. (HEAVEN ONLY KNOWS WHY!)
"THE AVENGERS ARE HERE...
"HERE COME THE DYNAMIC DEFENDERS...
"THE HULK LOOKS LIKE HE WAS BORN TO WEAR THAT TUXEDO, DOESN'T HE?
"THE INHUMANS HAVE COME OUT OF HIDING TO ATTEND TODAY'S FESTIVITIES...
"THE X-MEN ARE HERE...
"EVEN THE LEGION OF MONSTERS SHOWED UP!
"NOW THERE'S A GROUP YOU DON'T SEE EVERY DAY!"
OUR SOURCES TELL US THAT MILLIE THE MODEL AND FIN FANG FOOM WILL BE HERE AS SOON AS MILLIE HELPS FIN ON WITH HIS TUXEDO...
OH, BOY!
THIS IS SUCH A JOYOUS OCCASION...
...SO WHY DO I HAVE SUCH A FEELING OF FOREBODING?
MEANWHILE, AS THE GUESTS OF HONOR ARRIVE...
TAXI
HERE YA GO, LOCKLEY! KEEP THE CHANGE!
WHAT A GRIMM TIP...
HEY, WATCH YER DUST, CABBY!! GEEZ, AIN'T A DIME WORTH ANYTHIN' THESE DAYS?
COME ON, OLD FRIEND, THEY'RE WAITING FOR US INSIDE.

AND ONCE INSIDE...
WELL, I'LL BE...
GOODNESS!
OH, MY.
OY, VEY...
WELCOME, HONORED GUESTS TO THE FANTASTIC FOUR ROAST!
ROAST? I THOUGHT IT WAS GONNA BE A 'TOAST'!?
TONIGHT'S BANQUET WILL BE THAT AND MORE, BEN GRIMM, BUT FIRST, PREPARE YOURSELF TO GRIN AND BEAR THE COMMENTS OF YOUR SUPER-POWERED PEERS! THEY'RE A FUN BUNCH OF GUYS AND GALS, AS I'M SURE YOU ARE AWARE!
"THE ROAST," AS YOU PROBABLY KNOW, IS AN OLD SHOW BUSINESS TRADITION, AND IF YOU'RE WONDERING WHAT SHOW BUSINESS HAS TO DO WITH FOLKS IN YOUR LINE OF ENDEAVOR, I ASK YOU, WHEN WAS THE LAST TIME YOU SAW SUCH A FLASHY COLLECTION OF CLOTHES?
NOT SINCE LIBERACE TOOK HIS WARDROBE DOWN TO THE DRY CLEANERS, I'LL BET!
OH, PARDON ME FOR NOT INTRODUCING MYSELF -- I'M YOUR HOST, FRED HEMBECK!
THERE WILL BE A SHORT PAUSE NOW WHILE EVERYONE SAYS, "SO WHAT?" AND THEN ON WITH THE FESTIVITIES!
MR. FANTASTIC, THING, INVISIBLE PERSON, HUMAN TORCH -- IT'S A PLEASURE TO HAVE YOU HERE TONIGHT, AND YOU HAVE MY WORD, THERE'LL BE NO PIES IN THE FACE WHILE I'M IN CHARGE!
OF COURSE, THAT'S ABOUT ALL I'LL PROMISE, HEH, HEH!
WELL, TORCH, DO YOU HAVE ANY IDEA WHO OUR FIRST SPEAKER IS?
NO, I DON'T, FRED. IN FACT, I DON'T SEE ANYONE APPROACHING THE DAIS.
THAT'S BECAUSE YOU DIDN'T LOOK UP, FLAME-BRAIN!
YES, FOLKS, IT'S OUR FRIENDLY NEIGHBORHOOD SPIDER-MAN!
WHY'S IT GOTTA BE MY NEIGHBORHOOD?

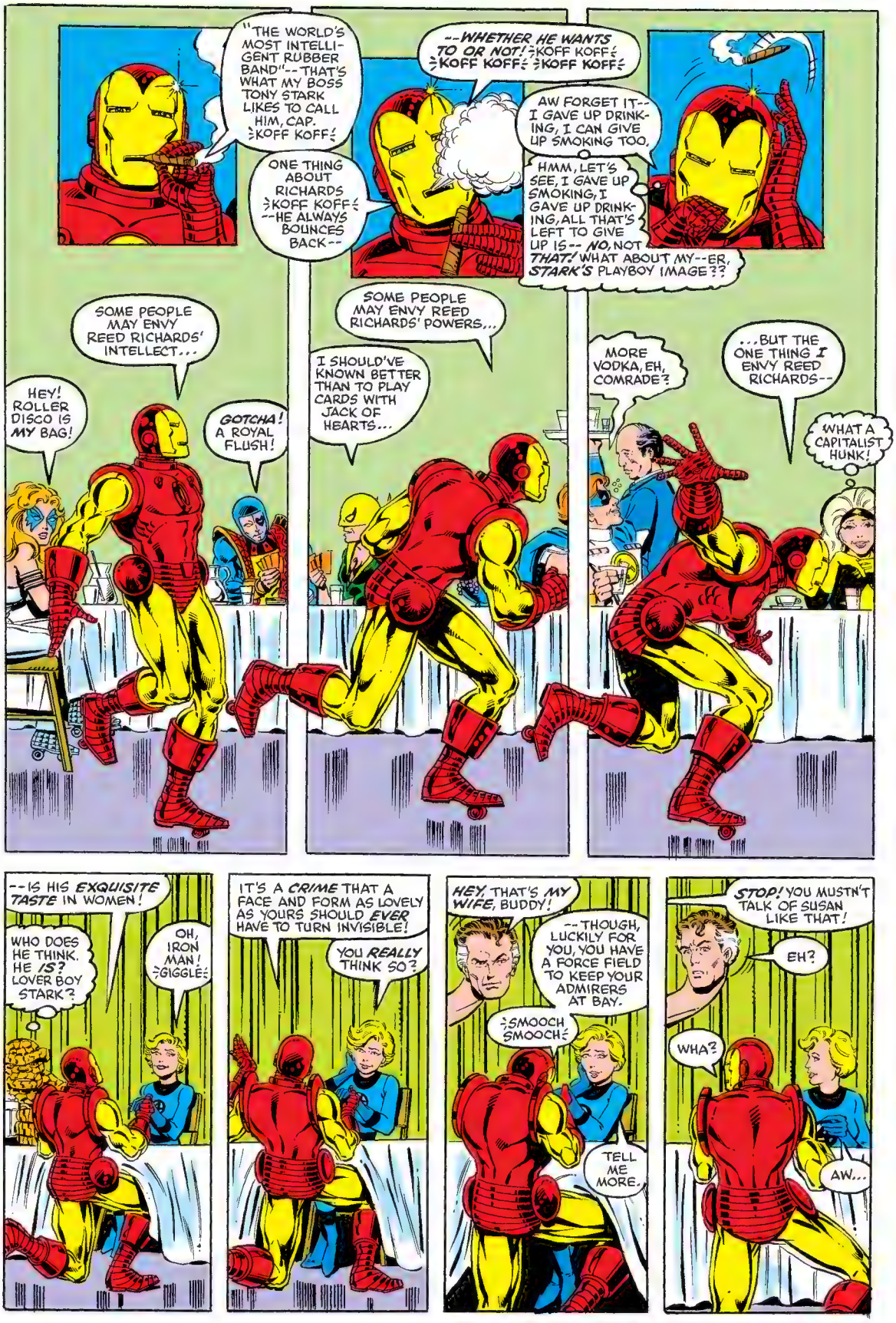

NOW IS THAT ANY WAY TO TALK ABOUT YOUR OLDEST AND DEAREST FRIEND?
NO, I GUESS IT'S NOT...
--BUT IF I SAID WHAT I REALLY WANTED TO SAY--
THE TV STATION WOULD LOSE ITS FCC LICENSE! YOU WOULDN'T WANT THAT, WOULD YOU?
TRY ME.
I LIKE YOUR STYLE, WEBHEAD, LANDING WITH YOUR BACK TO THE AUDIENCE.
HARD TO BELIEVE THIS GUY STARTED HIS CAREER IN SHOW BUSINESS, ISN'T IT, FOLKS?
HEY, I'M SUPPOSED TO MAKE WITH THE SMART REMARKS, NOT YOU, HOT-HEAD! AND SPEAKING OF HOT, IS IT EVER! HOW ABOUT COOLING OFF FOR THE DURATION?
SORRY, PAL, MY FANS ARE HERE TO SEE THE HUMAN TORCH, NOT PLAIN OLD JOHNNY STORM, SO THE FLAME STAYS ON.
FINE. I ROAST YOU, YOU ROAST ME. SEEMS FAIR.
WORKING WITH THE TORCH, A SITUATION I'VE BLUNDERED INTO AN EMBARRASSING NUMBER OF TIMES, IS LIKE HAVING A BAD CASE OF HEARTBURN--ALL OVER YOUR BODY!
THEY SAY SOME LIKE IT HOT, BUT THIS BOY LIKES IT SCALDING!
I WANNA TELL YA...
...WHEN THE TORCH HAS MONEY TO BURN, HE HAS MONEY TO BURN, YOU UNDERSTAND WHAT I'M SAYING?
HUH? I'M BEING SERVED A SANDWICH? BOY, WHAT A CHEESY BANQUET!
OH, WELL, I HAVEN'T HAD A BITE TO EAT ALL DAY, SO...
SOME SAY THE TORCH IS MATCHLESS, BUT I--
HEY!!
DON'T EAT THAT SANDWICH!
WHA--? WHY NOT?
BECAUSE THAT'S NO ORDINARY SANDWICH--
--THAT'S A SANDMAN SANDWICH!
WELL, GOTTA RUN NOW! IT'S BEEN FUN!
WHO PUT THE MAYONNAISE ALL OVER ME?!?
WHO CATERED THIS AFFAIR--DOCTOR DOOM??

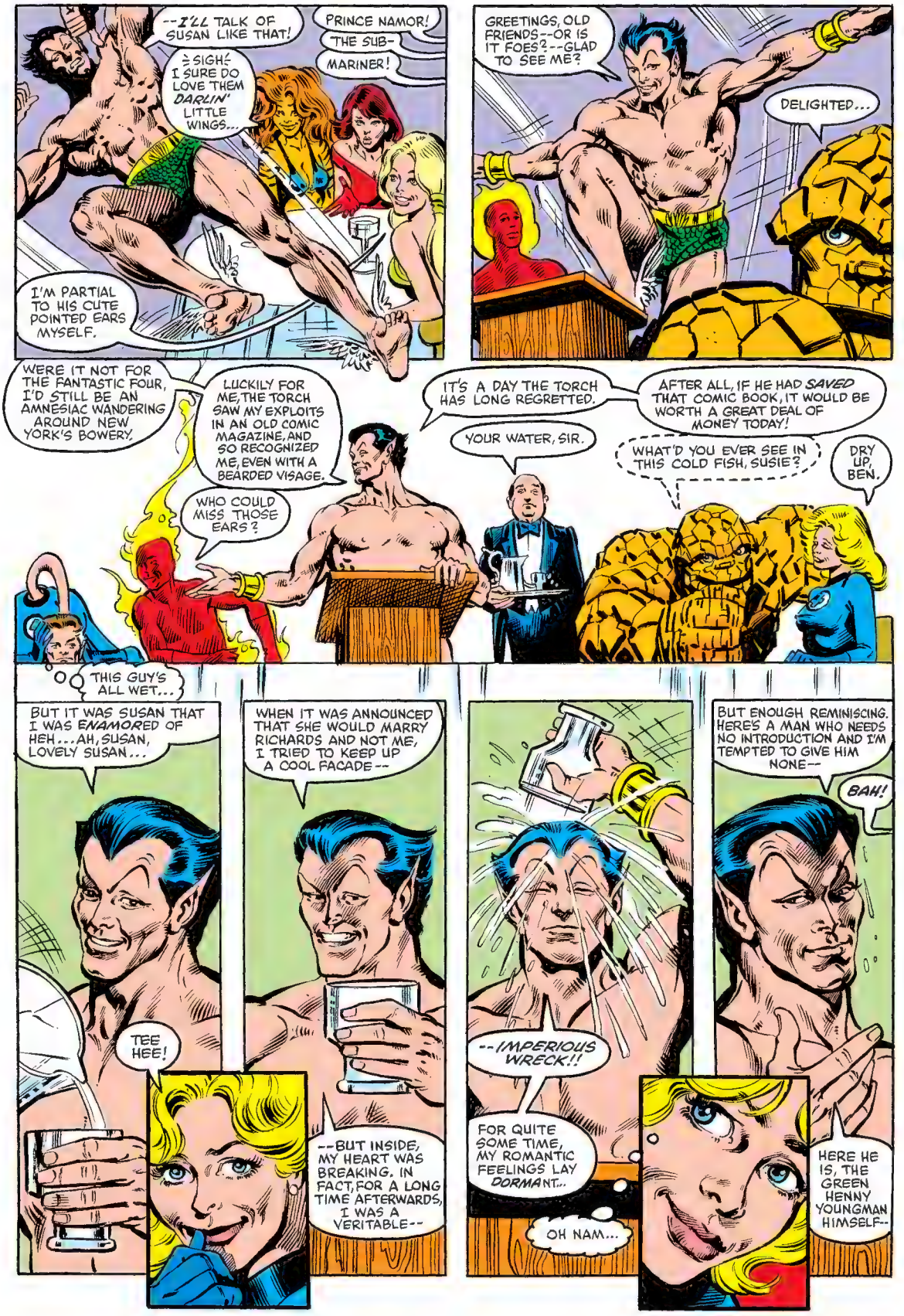

JUST SAY THE WORD, REED, AND I'LL GLADLY TURN HIS MASS INTO GLASS! THE NERVE OF HIM SHOWING UP HERE TONIGHT!
NO, JOHNNY, WAIT!
GETTING HOT UNDER THE COLLAR, SONNY BOY?
TOUGH! I WAS INVITED!
UH...THAT'S RIGHT, FOLKS. AFTER ALL, WHAT WOULD THE FANTASTIC FOUR BE WITHOUT THEIR FOES? ALL OF WHOM, I'D LIKE TO HASTILY ADD, HAVE AGREED TO ABUSE THE F.F. VERBALLY ONLY THIS EVENING!
YEAH, BUT THAT DON'T MEAN I GOTTA PUT UP WITH YOU, PUNK! HERE, LET ME GIVE YOU A HAND OFF!
OOPS!
THE PUNK'S GOT A POINT, THOUGH. WITHOUT US BAD GUYS THE F.F. WOULD BE OUT OF BUSINESS TOMORROW.
"BAD GUYS LIKE THE MAD THINKER...
WHAT? ME WORRY?
"PHARAOH RAMA TUT...
AND I MAY OR MAY NOT BE DR. DOOM AS WELL. IN FACT, AT ONE TIME OR ANOTHER, I WAS KANG, IMMORTUS, THE SCARLET CENTURION, AND THE TIDY BOWL MAN!
NO RELATION TO KING TUT, HOWEVER.
"ANNIHILUS...
JUST CALL ME LITTLE ORPHAN ANNIHILUS.
"THE MOLECULE MAN...
REED RICHARDS THINKS HE KNOWS SO MUCH ABOUT UNSTABLE MOLECULES!! WHY, IN MY HEAD ALONE...!
"PSYCHO-MAN...
DON'T BE AFRAID, UNDER THIS MASK, I'M REALLY TONY PERKINS,
WANNA MEET MY MOM?
"THE RED GHOST AND HIS SUPER APES...
THEY'RE THE GORILLAS OF MY DREAMS!
VOOTIE!
"DIABLO, THE HATE MONGER, AND THE MOLE MAN...
I'D PROBABLY ENJOY THIS BEER MORE IF I HAD A MOUTH OPENING IN MY HOOD...
THIS IS THE ONLY WAY TO BEAT THAT LOUSY NEW YORK TRAFFIC...
"THE MIRACLE MAN, AND THE ALIEN SKRULLS...
SAY, I THOUGHT YOU SKRULLS WERE ALL GREEN-SKINNED. WHO'S THAT?
THAT? THAT'S THE RED SKRULL, OF COURSE...
"GALACTUS, THE PUPPET MASTER, AND THE INVINCIBLE MAN...
WHERE ARE THE HORS D'OEVRES?
DON'T BE A DUMMY, MASTERS! YOU KNOW WHAT'LL HAPPEN IF ALICIA MARRIES GRIMM?
DON'T REMIND ME! I'LL BECOME THE THING'S =CHOKE= FATHER-IN-LAW!

...AND, MOST IMPORTANTLY, ME AND MY PARTNERS IN THE FRIGHTFUL FOUR --THE WINGLESS WIZARD, AND MY LITTLE BUDDY, PASTE POT PETE!
THAT'S THE TRAPSTER, SANDMAN-- YOU KNOW HOW I HATE THAT OTHER NAME!
OAF.
GOTCHA, PETE. SAY, REMEMBER HOW WE EVEN BEAT THE OTHER F.F. A COUPLA TIMES? WHY--
PARDON ME FOR BUTTIN' IN, BUT IF YOU GUYS ARE THE FRIGHTFUL FOUR, HOWCOME I ONLY COUNT THREE OF YOU, GRAIN BRAIN?
THAT'S CUZ WE'VE HAD ABOUT A DOZEN FOURTH MEMBERS, ROCK-HEAD.
ALL BECAUSE OUR ORIGINAL FOURTH CUT OUT ON US--
--MADAME MEDUSA, THE INHUMAN CHICK! THAT SHOULDN'T COME AS ANY SURPRISE TO YOU THOUGH-- I SEE SHE'S TERMINATED HER MEMBERSHIP IN YOUR LITTLE FOURSOME AS WELL!
YEAH, SHE DUMPED US FOR A GUY WHO'D BRING THE ROOF DOWN IF HE EVER DARED WHISPER SWEET NOTHIN'S IN HER SHELL-LIKE EAR!
HEH...
ENOUGH!
I'LL NOT HAVE THE LIKES OF YOU INSULT MY LIEGE AND LOVE, BLACK BOLT!
MMMMPHH!
BLESS YA, RED! IT SURE ENOUGH LOOKS LIKE IT'S--
--SOUP TIME!!
WILL YOU...UH... GENTLEMEN PLEASE BE SEATED SO WE CAN GO ABOUT SERVING EVERYONE?
AWWW...
SNP
THINGS GOT HAIRY FOR A SECOND THERE, FOLKS, BUT EVERYTHING'S FINE NOW.
IS IT?
WE'LL SEE WHAT HAPPENS WHEN THE TORCH SLURPS UP MY SPECIAL "CREAM OF DANGER" SOUP!
HEH HEH...

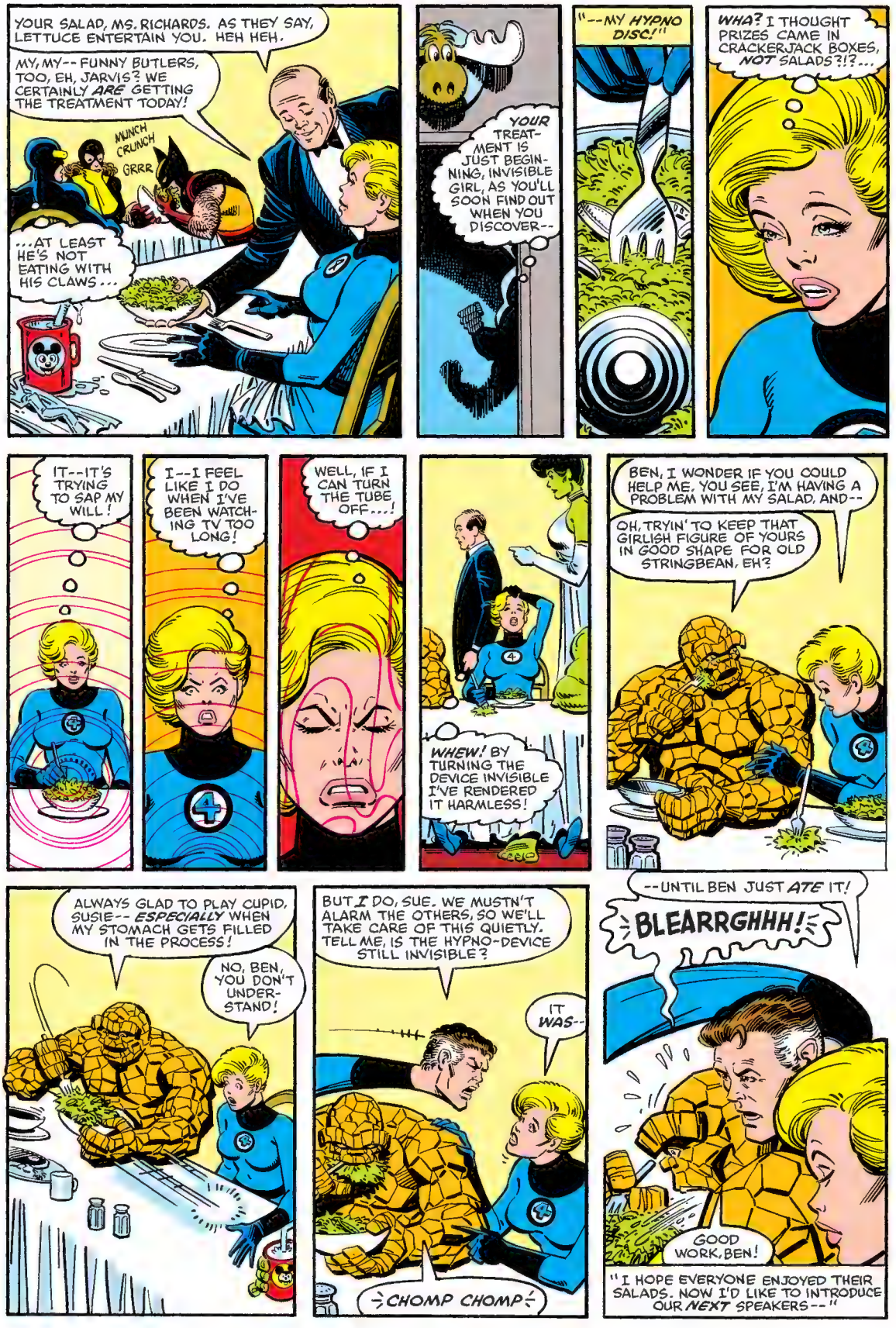

BOY, AM I STARVED!
YOUR SOUP, MASTER TORCH.
THANKS, JARVIS. YOU'RE A HERO FOR BRINGING ME THIS SOUP. GUESS THAT MAKES YOU A SOUP HERO, EH? HA HA! "SOUP HERO"-- GET IT, JARVIS?
YES, MASTER TORCH-- HA HA.
HMM... TOO HOT...
STEVE MARTIN NEEDN'T WORRY ABOUT THE COMPETITION...
I'D BETTER FLAME OFF FOR THIS.
MM-MMMM. CHUNKY SOUP-- MY FAVORITE!
THERE'S A CHUNK OF POTATO, A CARROT, AN ONION, SOME PEAS, A BOMB, A TOMATO...
A BOMB?!?
DOES CAMPBELL'S KNOW ABOUT THIS?
REED, THERE'S A BOMB IN MY SOUP!
LEAVE THE JOKES TO THE OTHERS, JOHNNY.
NO, REALLY, REED! I'M GONNA PUT IT IN MY HAND AND MELT IT!
NO, DON'T DO THAT-- WE DON'T WANT TO ATTRACT UNDUE ATTENTION.
AFTER ALL, WE MUSTN'T SPOIL THIS PARTY FOR THE OTHERS. FLAME ON INSTEAD.
BUT--
NO BUTS, JOHNNY. MELT IT IN YOUR MOUTH, NOT IN YOUR HANDS.
÷URP÷
ANYBODY GOT A BROMO?
WILL YOU LOOK AT THAT! THE KID JUST SPIT THE SLAG FROM HIS SPOON ON THE FLOOR! I SWEAR HE AIN'T GOT NO COUTH! NOT LIKE HIS SISTER SUSIE, IT'S HARD TO BELIEVE THEY'RE FROM THE SAME FAMILY.
÷SLURRRP÷
THEN AGAIN MAYBE IT'S NOT THAT HARD...
I CERTAINLY HOPE YOU ENJOYED THE SOUP.
IT WAS DELICIOUS!
GREAT! NOW DON'T GET TESTY, BUT WE HAVE MORE TESTIMONIALS COMING UP. MORE FOOD WILL FOLLOW, THOUGH-- I PROMISE!
AND NOW I'D LIKE TO INTRODUCE A MAN AFTER GEORGE WASHINGTON'S-- AND BETSY ROSS'S HEARTS! THE ONE AND ONLY LIVING LEGEND OF WORLD WAR TWO--
TOO MANY BEERS, UNION JACK? ARE YOU KIDDING? I'M JUST GETTING STARTED!

--CAPTAIN AMERICA!
THIS IS FOR THE BIRDS... AND THE FALCON SHOULD KNOW!
UH...BUT BEFORE I GET STARTED, I'D BETTER RUN!
NO WONDER THEY CALL HIM THE WHIZZER...
WOULD YOU BE KIND ENOUGH TO HOLD MY SHIELD WHILE I'M AT THE PODIUM, SON?
WOULD I? IT'D BE THE BIGGEST THRILL OF MY LIFE!
REMEMBER WHISKERS, DON'T YIELD, HOLD CAP'S SHIELD!
FORTY YEARS AGO, AMERICA CALLED THROUGHOUT THE LAND FOR MEN TO HELP PUT A STOP TO THE INSIDIOUS NAZI MENACE.
FREEDOM-LOVING MEN FROM ALL OVER THIS GREAT LAND OF OURS STEPPED FORWARD IN OUR HOUR OF NEED. I MYSELF WAS TRANSFORMED FROM A SCRAWNY 4-F INTO AMERICA'S SUPER-SOLDIER.
AND WHO CAN FORGET SGT. FURY AND HIS HOWLING COMMANDOS DUM DUM, PINKY, IZZY, GABE, ERIC AND REB?
SOME OF YOU MAY ALSO RECALL CAPTAIN SAVAGE AND HIS LEATHERNECK RAIDERS.
I MYSELF ONLY VAGUELY REMEMBER COMBAT KELLY AND HIS DEADLY DOZEN, HOWEVER...
≥SNIFF≤
BUT HOW MANY PEOPLE RECALL THAT REED RICHARDS AND BEN GRIMM ALSO FOUGHT IN THE BIG ONE? YUP, IT'S TRUE!
NOW I WAS IN SUSPENDED ANIMATION FOR A COUPLE OF DECADES --IN ICE ON ICE, YOU MIGHT SAY-- WHICH EXPLAINS ME--
--BUT THESE TWO GUYS HAVE GOT TO BE THE OLDEST SUPERHEROES AROUND, FER GOSHSAKES!
NOBODY'D BE ABLE TO GUESS YOUR AGE, BEN. NOBODY'D WANT TO...
IT'S MY ROCK HARD SKIN, CAP. JUST KEEP THE PIGEONS AWAY, DUST ME OCCASIONALLY, AND I'M HAPPY.
I'LL BET YOU ARE.
AND WHAT'S THE SECRET OF YOUR YOUTHFUL APPEARANCE, REED?
I GUESS IT MUST BE MY RUBBERY COMPLEXION, CAP...
--THAT, PLUS THE FACT THAT I REGULARLY DUNK MY HEAD IN PALMOLIVE DISHWASHING DETERGENT!
WHERE'S MADGE WHEN YOU NEED HER?
REED, I THINK WE ALL BETTER LEAVE THE JOKES TO THE OTHERS...


"THE WORLD'S MOST INTELLIGENT RUBBER BAND"--THAT'S WHAT MY BOSS TONY STARK LIKES TO CALL HIM, CAP. KOFF KOFF
ONE THING ABOUT RICHARDS KOFF KOFF --HE ALWAYS BOUNCES BACK--
--WHETHER HE WANTS TO OR NOT! KOFF KOFF KOFF KOFF KOFF
AW FORGET IT--I GAVE UP DRINKING, I CAN GIVE UP SMOKING TOO.
HMM, LET'S SEE, I GAVE UP SMOKING, I GAVE UP DRINKING, ALL THAT'S LEFT TO GIVE UP IS-- NO, NOT THAT! WHAT ABOUT MY--ER, STARK'S PLAYBOY IMAGE??
SOME PEOPLE MAY ENVY REED RICHARDS' INTELLECT...
HEY! ROLLER DISCO IS MY BAG!
GOTCHA! A ROYAL FLUSH!
SOME PEOPLE MAY ENVY REED RICHARDS' POWERS...
I SHOULD'VE KNOWN BETTER THAN TO PLAY CARDS WITH JACK OF HEARTS...
MORE VODKA, EH, COMRADE?
...BUT THE ONE THING I ENVY REED RICHARDS--
WHAT A CAPITALIST HUNK!
--IS HIS EXQUISITE TASTE IN WOMEN!
WHO DOES HE THINK. HE IS? LOVER BOY STARK?
OH, IRON MAN! GIGGLE
IT'S A CRIME THAT A FACE AND FORM AS LOVELY AS YOURS SHOULD EVER HAVE TO TURN INVISIBLE!
YOU REALLY THINK SO?
HEY, THAT'S MY WIFE, BUDDY!
--THOUGH, LUCKILY FOR YOU, YOU HAVE A FORCE FIELD TO KEEP YOUR ADMIRERS AT BAY.
SMOOCH SMOOCH
TELL ME MORE.
STOP! YOU MUSTN'T TALK OF SUSAN LIKE THAT!
EH?
WHA?
AW...


--I'LL TALK OF SUSAN LIKE THAT!
PRINCE NAMOR! THE SUB-MARINER!
≥SIGH≤ I SURE DO LOVE THEM DARLIN' LITTLE WINGS...
I'M PARTIAL TO HIS CUTE POINTED EARS MYSELF.
GREETINGS, OLD FRIENDS--OR IS IT FOES?--GLAD TO SEE ME?
DELIGHTED...
WERE IT NOT FOR THE FANTASTIC FOUR, I'D STILL BE AN AMNESIAC WANDERING AROUND NEW YORK'S BOWERY.
LUCKILY FOR ME, THE TORCH SAW MY EXPLOITS IN AN OLD COMIC MAGAZINE, AND SO RECOGNIZED ME, EVEN WITH A BEARDED VISAGE.
WHO COULD MISS THOSE EARS?
IT'S A DAY THE TORCH HAS LONG REGRETTED.
YOUR WATER, SIR.
AFTER ALL, IF HE HAD SAVED THAT COMIC BOOK, IT WOULD BE WORTH A GREAT DEAL OF MONEY TODAY!
WHAT'D YOU EVER SEE IN THIS COLD FISH, SUSIE?
DRY UP, BEN.
THIS GUY'S ALL WET...
BUT IT WAS SUSAN THAT I WAS ENAMORED OF HEH...AH, SUSAN, LOVELY SUSAN...
TEE HEE!
WHEN IT WAS ANNOUNCED THAT SHE WOULD MARRY RICHARDS AND NOT ME, I TRIED TO KEEP UP A COOL FACADE--
--BUT INSIDE, MY HEART WAS BREAKING. IN FACT, FOR A LONG TIME AFTERWARDS, I WAS A VERITABLE--
--IMPERIOUS WRECK!!
FOR QUITE SOME TIME, MY ROMANTIC FEELINGS LAY DORMANT...
OH NAM...
BUT ENOUGH REMINISCING. HERE'S A MAN WHO NEEDS NO INTRODUCTION AND I'M TEMPTED TO GIVE HIM NONE--
BAH!
HERE HE IS, THE GREEN HENNY YOUNGMAN HIMSELF--

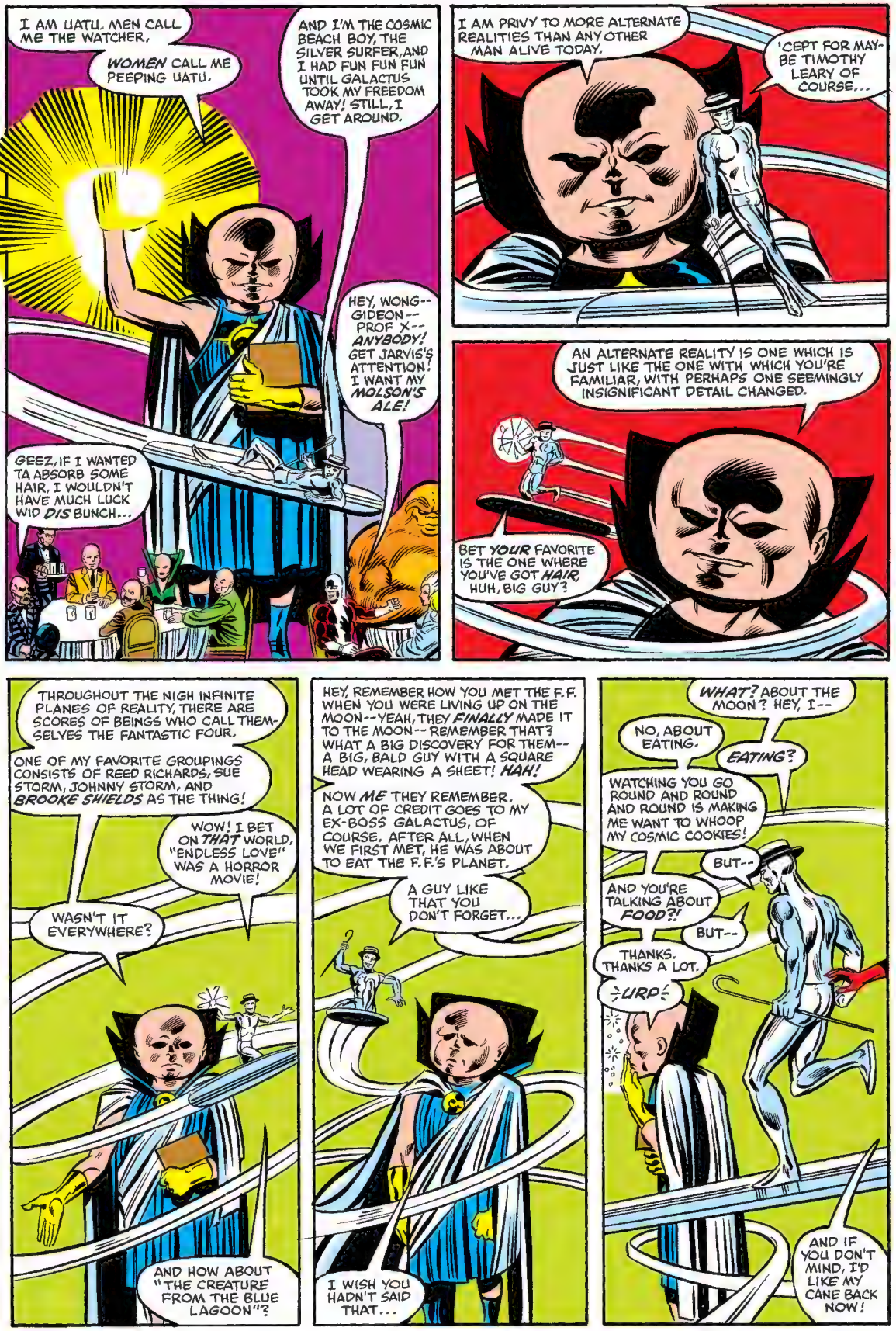
--THE INCREDIBLE, INEDIBLE HULK!
WAY TO GO, LETTUCE LIPS!
IF YOU KNEW ABOUT THE SHE-HULK AND ME, RICK, YOU'D BE GREEN WITH ENVY!
HULK HAS PREPARED MATERIAL HERE SOMEWHERE...
GOOD! HULK FIND PAPER WITH FUNNY JOKES ON IT!
HUH! HULK CAN'T READ PUNY WORDS!
THERE! THAT'S BETTER! NOW HULK CAN READ PUNY JOKES!
"WHY DID PUNY HUMAN THROW CLOCK OUT OF WINDOW?"
GIVE UP?
"TO SEE IF TIME COULD FLY!"
HA HA HA!
"WHY DID HULK THROW PUNY HUMAN OUT OF WINDOW?"
DON'T KNOW?
"TO SEE IF PUNY HUMAN COULD FLY!"
HA HA HA HA HA HA HA HA!!
PUNY AUDIENCE DOESN'T THINK HULK'S JOKES ARE FUNNY?!?
HA
UH, HULK? I'M SORRY, BUT YOUR TIME IS UP. IT'S TIME TO SERVE THE SALAD. SAY, MAYBE YOU'D CARE TO STAY FOR THAT, IT BEING GREEN AND ALL, HEH HEH...
NO BEANS?!? BAH. HULK IS LEAVING. GOT BAR MITZVAH TO DO IN TWENTY MINUTES, ANYWAY.

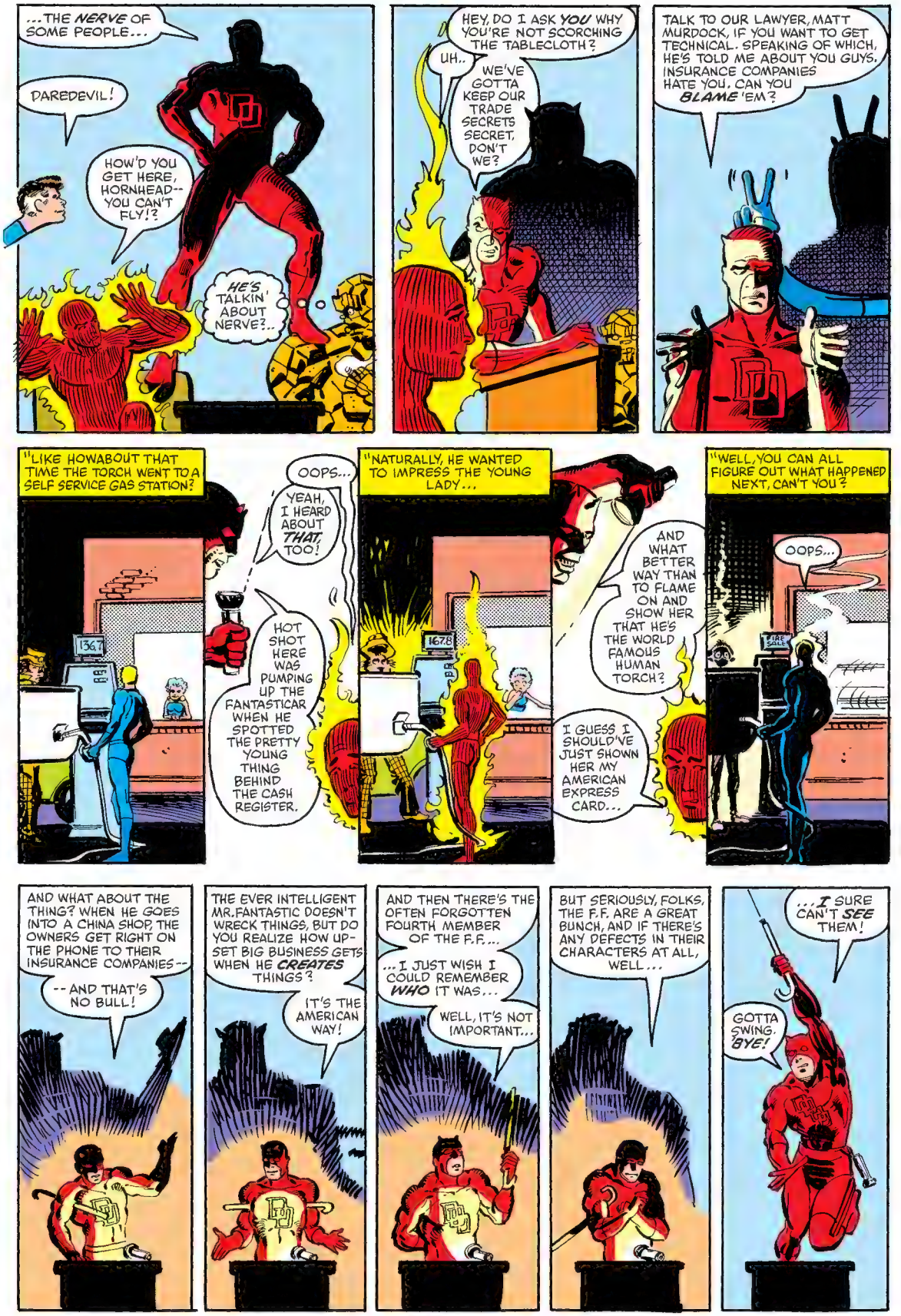

YOUR SALAD, MS. RICHARDS. AS THEY SAY, LETTUCE ENTERTAIN YOU. HEH HEH.
MY, MY-- FUNNY BUTLERS, TOO, EH, JARVIS? WE CERTAINLY *ARE* GETTING THE TREATMENT TODAY!
MUNCH CRUNCH
GRRR
...AT LEAST HE'S NOT EATING WITH HIS CLAWS...
YOUR TREATMENT IS JUST BEGINNING, INVISIBLE GIRL, AS YOU'LL SOON FIND OUT WHEN YOU DISCOVER--
"--MY *HYPNO DISC!*"
WHA? I THOUGHT PRIZES CAME IN CRACKERJACK BOXES, *NOT* SALADS?!?...
IT--IT'S TRYING TO SAP MY WILL!
I--I FEEL LIKE I DO WHEN I'VE BEEN WATCHING TV TOO LONG!
WELL, IF I CAN TURN THE TUBE OFF...!
WHEW! BY TURNING THE DEVICE INVISIBLE I'VE RENDERED IT HARMLESS!
BEN, I WONDER IF YOU COULD HELP ME. YOU SEE, I'M HAVING A PROBLEM WITH MY SALAD, AND--
OH, TRYIN' TO KEEP THAT GIRLISH FIGURE OF YOURS IN GOOD SHAPE FOR OLD STRINGBEAN, EH?
ALWAYS GLAD TO PLAY CUPID, SUSIE-- *ESPECIALLY* WHEN MY STOMACH GETS FILLED IN THE PROCESS!
NO, BEN, YOU DON'T UNDERSTAND!
BUT *I* DO, SUE. WE MUSTN'T ALARM THE OTHERS, SO WE'LL TAKE CARE OF THIS QUIETLY. TELL ME, IS THE HYPNO-DEVICE STILL INVISIBLE?
IT *WAS*--
CHOMP CHOMP
--UNTIL BEN JUST *ATE* IT!
BLEARRGHHH!
GOOD WORK, BEN!
"I HOPE EVERYONE ENJOYED THEIR SALADS. NOW I'D LIKE TO INTRODUCE OUR *NEXT* SPEAKERS--"

"--POWER MAN AND IRON FIST!"
WHEN YOU'RE IN THE HERO-FOR-HIRE BUSINESS, YOU NEVER KNOW WHO'S GONNA FOOT THE BILL, DIG?
SO IMAGINE MY SURPRISE BACK WHEN REED RICHARDS HIMSELF HIRED ME TO REPLACE THE THING, WHO DIDN'T HAPPEN TO BE ENOUGH OF A THING AT THE TIME TO SUIT THE F. F.'S PURPOSES, Y'KNOW?
OF COURSE, WITH OR WITHOUT ORANGE SKIN, BEN GRIMM AIN'T EXACTLY ROBERT REDFORD, YOU UNDERSTAND ME?
WELL, IT WAS JUST A TEMPORARY GIG, BUT I LEARNED A LOT. ONE TIME--
ALL RIGHT, I'VE HAD IT-- HOLD IT RIGHT THERE!
FIST?...
WHAT ABOUT ME? I'M YOUR PARTNER--WHY DON'T YOU LET ME SAY ANYTHING?!?
YOU DON'T KNOW THE F.F., MAN.
AND WHOSE FAULT IS THAT? YOU NEVER TAKE ME OVER TO THE BAXTER BUILDING WITH YOU! I CERTAINLY WOULDN'T CUT YOU OUT LIKE THAT! AFTER ALL, DIDN'T I INTRODUCE YOU TO THE SONS OF THE TIGER??
YEAH, YOU DID.
THAT REALLY MADE MY DAY, FIST...
WHAT'S THE MATTER? YOU AFRAID I'LL RUIN THE FURNITURE OR SOMETHING?!?
HEY, M'MAN, BE COOL, BE COOL...
YEAH, PAL, DON'T SWEAT IT. YOU'RE WELCOME TO STOP BY ANYTI--
KEEP OUT OF THIS GRIMM!!
THIS IS BETWEEN MY PARTNER AND ME!
POW!
...SWEET MAMA...
LUKE, YOU... DUCKED?
Y'KNOW, FIST, IF THE F.F. EVER GO SHOPPING FOR A REPLACEMENT AGAIN, I DON'T THINK YOU'LL BE VERY HIGH ON THEIR LIST.

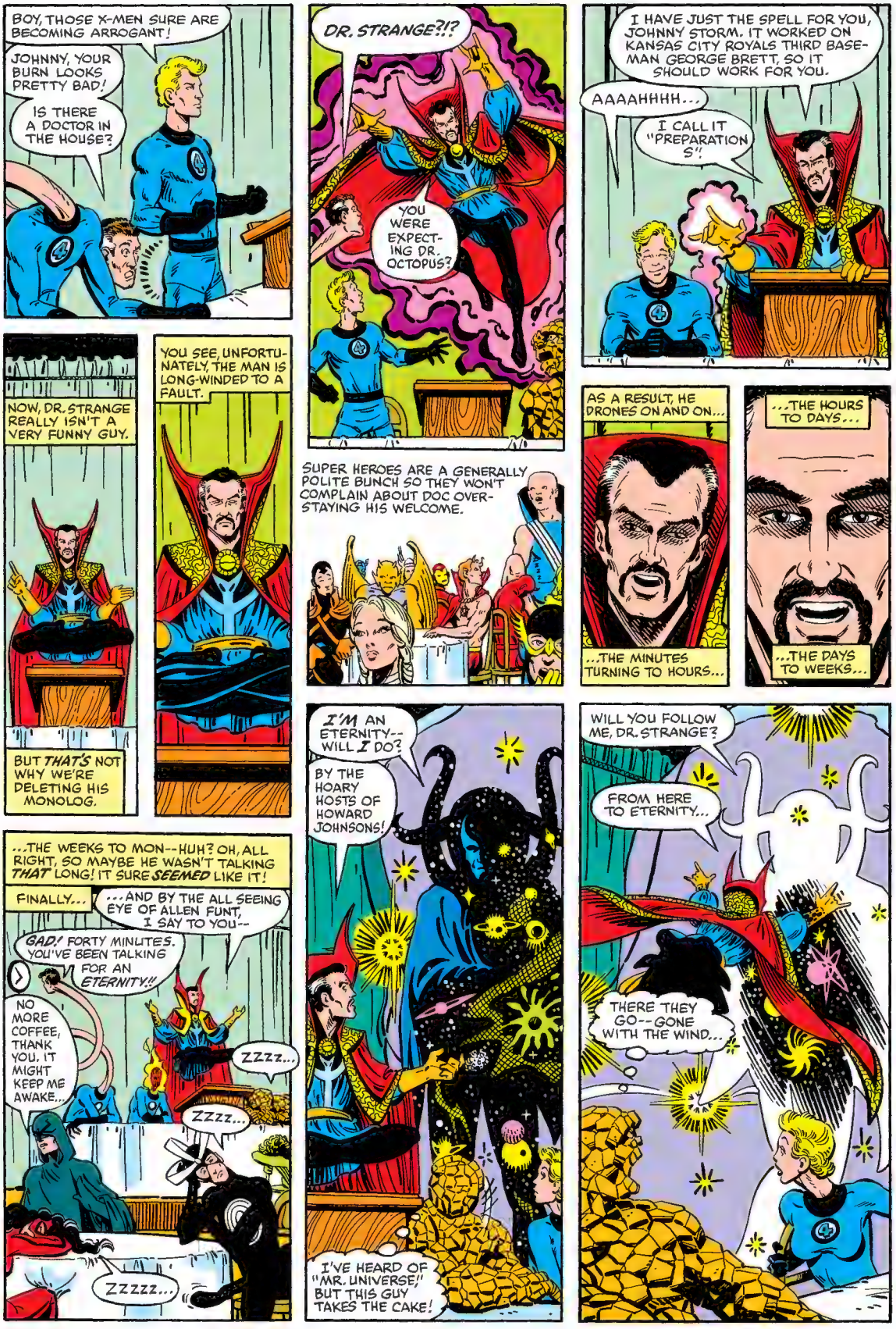
AVENGERS ASSEMBLE!
WHAT A REVOLTIN' DEVELOPMENT THIS IS!
HOW'D YOU GET UP HERE WITH US BIRDS, MR. GRIMM--USE A GUIDED MUSCLE?
QUICK, VISION--GET ME AWAY FROM THOSE FEET! PHEW!
BEN LOOKS PRETTY GOOD UP THERE IN THAT CHANDELIER, DON'T YOU THINK, REED? I WONDER HOW HE'D LOOK OVER THE MANTELPIECE?
PIPE DOWN WISE GUY!
PERSONALLY, I THINK HE'D LOOK JUST GREAT STUFFED...
SIGH...THE BLACK WIDOW LOOKS AS GOOD AS EVER...
WE AVENGERS WOULD LIKE TO REMIND YOU WHY WE'RE ALL HERE TONIGHT.
BEAST WHAT DO YOU THINK YOU'RE DOING?
OH, JUST HANGING AROUND!
MMM... NICE HAIR...
SIGH... HAWKEYE LOOKS AS LOVESICK AS EVER...
YOU OKAY, MR. GRIMM?
WOULD YOU MIND FLAMING OFF, TORCH--I'M MELTING!
COOL IT, ICEMAN, IT'S MY PARTY AND I'LL FRY IF I WANT TO!
YEAH, BIRDBRAIN, YEAH! AND LAY OFF THAT "MR. GRIMM" JAZZ OR I'LL SEND YOU ON AN EXPRESS TRIP TO THE HARTZ MOUNTAINS!
ONCE, NOT SO LONG AGO, THERE WAS A PATRIOTIC SCIENTIST WHO WANTED TO BEAT THE RUSSIANS TO THE MOON,
HIS NAME WAS REED RICHARDS, AND NOT ONLY WAS HE SMART ENOUGH TO BUILD HIS OWN ROCKET-SHIP...
...BUT HE WAS ALSO CLEVER ENOUGH TO HAVE HIS OWN SECRET LAUNCHING PAD!
A STALWART PILOT BY THE NAME OF BENJAMIN GRIMM WAS SET TO GUIDE THE CRAFT...
AND NATURALLY, RICHARDS TOOK HIS FIANCEE WITH HIM, AFTER ALL, THE MOON'S A LONELY PLACE.
NOT WITH SUE'S KID BROTHER JOHNNY ALONG FOR THE RIDE, THOUGH!
BUT, UH-OH--REED MADE ONE MISTAKE--NOT ENOUGH SHIELDING ON THE SHIP'S EXTERIOR.
LOOKOUT, GANG, HERE COME THOSE CRAZY COSMIC RAYS! DON'T GET CAUGHT WITH YOUR GENES DOWN!
THE MOON TRIP WAS OFF. OUR QUARTET WAS LUCKY TO MAKE AN EARTH-BOUND LANDING.
WHEN THEY CAME OUT OF THAT SHIP, THEY WERE DIFFERENT. THEY'D... CHANGED.
REED RICHARDS' BODY BECAME UNBELIEVABLY PLIABLE, SORT OF LIKE SILLY PUTTY WITH A 200 I.Q....
SUE STORM HAD A FORMULA FOR VANISHING CREAM YOU WOULDN'T BELIEVE!
JOHNNY STORM FINALLY BECAME WHAT HE ALWAYS THOUGHT HE WAS--HOT STUFF!
AND BEN GRIMM HAD HIS BODY REARRANGED INTO ORANGE FLOWER POT FRAGMENTS!
I GUESS IT JUST WASN'T HIS DAY...
YOU MIGHT SAY THAT'S INCREDIBLE--
--BUT I'D RATHER SAY THAT'S FANTASTIC!

IF YOU'RE WONDERING WHAT HAPPENED TO WONDER MAN, WONDER NO MORE. HE'S OUT SHOOTING A COMMERCIAL--FOR WONDER BREAD, WITH MUSIC BY STEVIE WONDER. HEH...
NOW STRAIGHT FROM HIS BOFFO APPEARANCE WITH THE AVENGERS, IT GIVES ME GREAT PLEASURE INDEED TO INTRODUCE THAT OLD SON OF A GOD HIMSELF, THE MIGHTY THOR!
VERILY, I COME BEFORE YOU TO HONOR A GROUP OF MORTALS SO CELEBRATED THAT THEIR EXPLOITS ARE FOLLOWED EVEN BY THOSE WHO DWELL BEYOND THE RAINBOW BRIDGE!
IN FACT, THE GODS OF FABLED ASGARD HAVE CHOSEN ME AS THEIR MESSENGER ON THIS DAY OF DAYS.
BENEATH MY HELMET I HAVE AN ASGARDIAN PROCLAMATION, WHICH I PRESENT TO YOU, BEN GRIMM, ON BEHALF OF THE ALL-FATHER ODIN AND HIS ROYAL COURT.
AIN'T YOU GUYS GOT ANY POCKETS IN THAT OUTFIT?
HUH?
HEY, GOLDILOCKS, I CAN'T READ THIS!!
OF COURSE NOT. IT'S IN NORSE CODE!
O-O-O-O...
SO, GRIMM, YOU PERSIST IN REFERRING TO ME AS "GOLDILOCKS". WHY MUST A MAN AS BIG AS YOU STOOP TO HARBORING SUCH A PETTY JEALOUSY?
WHA--? JEALOUS? JEALOUS OF WHAT?
MY HAIR, BALD ONE!
"BALD ONE"?!?
YOU ARE THE BALDEST MAN I HAVE EVER MET. YOU HAVE NARY A HAIR ON YOUR ENTIRE BODY. WHY, YOU'RE SO BALD, I HAVE A FRIEND WHO'S BALDER, AND YET HE HAS MORE HAIR THAN YOU DO!
OH, YEAH, WISE GUY? PROVE IT!!
WITH PLEASURE, BALDER?
GREETINGS, THUNDER GOD!
JUST ONE QUESTION, THOR...
YES, BEN GRIMM?
ISN'T IT ABOUT TIME FOR SOMEONE ELSE TO GET UP HERE?!?
METHINKS IT IS, GRIMM, METHINKS IT IS...


I AM UATU. MEN CALL ME THE WATCHER.
WOMEN CALL ME PEEPING UATU.
AND I'M THE COSMIC BEACH BOY, THE SILVER SURFER, AND I HAD FUN FUN FUN UNTIL GALACTUS TOOK MY FREEDOM AWAY! STILL, I GET AROUND.
HEY, WONG-- GIDEON-- PROF X-- ANYBODY! GET JARVIS'S ATTENTION! I WANT MY MOLSON'S ALE!
GEEZ, IF I WANTED TA ABSORB SOME HAIR, I WOULDN'T HAVE MUCH LUCK WID DIS BUNCH...
I AM PRIVY TO MORE ALTERNATE REALITIES THAN ANY OTHER MAN ALIVE TODAY.
'CEPT FOR MAYBE TIMOTHY LEARY OF COURSE...
AN ALTERNATE REALITY IS ONE WHICH IS JUST LIKE THE ONE WITH WHICH YOU'RE FAMILIAR, WITH PERHAPS ONE SEEMINGLY INSIGNIFICANT DETAIL CHANGED.
BET YOUR FAVORITE IS THE ONE WHERE YOU'VE GOT HAIR, HUH, BIG GUY?
THROUGHOUT THE NIGH INFINITE PLANES OF REALITY, THERE ARE SCORES OF BEINGS WHO CALL THEMSELVES THE FANTASTIC FOUR.
ONE OF MY FAVORITE GROUPINGS CONSISTS OF REED RICHARDS, SUE STORM, JOHNNY STORM, AND BROOKE SHIELDS AS THE THING!
WOW! I BET ON THAT WORLD, "ENDLESS LOVE" WAS A HORROR MOVIE!
WASN'T IT EVERYWHERE?
AND HOW ABOUT "THE CREATURE FROM THE BLUE LAGOON"?
HEY, REMEMBER HOW YOU MET THE F.F. WHEN YOU WERE LIVING UP ON THE MOON--YEAH, THEY FINALLY MADE IT TO THE MOON-- REMEMBER THAT? WHAT A BIG DISCOVERY FOR THEM-- A BIG, BALD GUY WITH A SQUARE HEAD WEARING A SHEET! HAH!
NOW ME THEY REMEMBER. A LOT OF CREDIT GOES TO MY EX-BOSS GALACTUS, OF COURSE. AFTER ALL, WHEN WE FIRST MET, HE WAS ABOUT TO EAT THE F.F.'S PLANET.
A GUY LIKE THAT YOU DON'T FORGET...
I WISH YOU HADN'T SAID THAT...
WHAT? ABOUT THE MOON? HEY, I--
NO, ABOUT EATING.
EATING?
WATCHING YOU GO ROUND AND ROUND AND ROUND IS MAKING ME WANT TO WHOOP MY COSMIC COOKIES!
BUT--
AND YOU'RE TALKING ABOUT FOOD?!
BUT--
THANKS. THANKS A LOT.
URP!
AND IF YOU DON'T MIND, I'D LIKE MY CANE BACK NOW!


...THE NERVE OF SOME PEOPLE...
DAREDEVIL!
HOW'D YOU GET HERE, HORNHEAD--YOU CAN'T FLY!?
HE'S TALKIN' ABOUT NERVE?..
HEY, DO I ASK YOU WHY YOU'RE NOT SCORCHING THE TABLECLOTH?
UH..
WE'VE GOTTA KEEP OUR TRADE SECRETS SECRET, DON'T WE?
TALK TO OUR LAWYER, MATT MURDOCK, IF YOU WANT TO GET TECHNICAL. SPEAKING OF WHICH, HE'S TOLD ME ABOUT YOU GUYS. INSURANCE COMPANIES HATE YOU. CAN YOU BLAME 'EM?
"LIKE HOWABOUT THAT TIME THE TORCH WENT TO A SELF SERVICE GAS STATION?
OOPS...
YEAH, I HEARD ABOUT THAT, TOO!
HOT SHOT HERE WAS PUMPING UP THE FANTASTICAR WHEN HE SPOTTED THE PRETTY YOUNG THING BEHIND THE CASH REGISTER.
"NATURALLY, HE WANTED TO IMPRESS THE YOUNG LADY...
AND WHAT BETTER WAY THAN TO FLAME ON AND SHOW HER THAT HE'S THE WORLD FAMOUS HUMAN TORCH?
I GUESS I SHOULD'VE JUST SHOWN HER MY AMERICAN EXPRESS CARD...
"WELL, YOU CAN ALL FIGURE OUT WHAT HAPPENED NEXT, CAN'T YOU?
OOPS...
AND WHAT ABOUT THE THING? WHEN HE GOES INTO A CHINA SHOP, THE OWNERS GET RIGHT ON THE PHONE TO THEIR INSURANCE COMPANIES--
-- AND THAT'S NO BULL!
THE EVER INTELLIGENT MR. FANTASTIC DOESN'T WRECK THINGS, BUT DO YOU REALIZE HOW UP-SET BIG BUSINESS GETS WHEN HE CREATES THINGS?
IT'S THE AMERICAN WAY!
AND THEN THERE'S THE OFTEN FORGOTTEN FOURTH MEMBER OF THE F.F....
...I JUST WISH I COULD REMEMBER WHO IT WAS...
WELL, IT'S NOT IMPORTANT...
BUT SERIOUSLY, FOLKS, THE F.F. ARE A GREAT BUNCH, AND IF THERE'S ANY DEFECTS IN THEIR CHARACTERS AT ALL, WELL...
...I SURE CAN'T SEE THEM!
GOTTA SWING. BYE!

AND HERE THEY ARE, FOLKS, THE SUPER GROUP OF THE EIGHTIES, THE UNCANNY X-MEN!
THANKS, FRED! I'D LIKE TO SAY WHAT A PLEASURE IT IS TO BE HERE TODAY, BUT THEN I'D BE LYING. CONSIDERING HOW POPULAR WE'VE BECOME RECENTLY, I CAN'T HELP BUT THINK THIS BANQUET SHOULD BE FOR US, NOT THE F.F. ...
PHEW! WHAT STINKS?
STILL, WE FIGURED WE COULD SPARE SOME TIME FROM THE PROMOTIONAL TOUR FOR NIGHTCRAWLER'S NEW BOOK, "MEIN BAMF," TO SALUTE THE SENIOR CITIZENS OF SUPERHERODOM, THE FEEBLE--ER-- FANTASTIC FOUR!
WHEN IT COMES TO MUSIC, YOU'RE PARTIAL TO THE OLD STANDARDS, AREN'T YOU, BEN GRIMM?
SO HOWABOUT A ROUSING CHORUS OF "STORMY WEATHER"?
HOWABOUT "RAINY DAYS AND MONDAYS ALWAYS BRING ME DOWN"--ESPECIALLY WHEN I GOTTA ATTEND A COCKAMAMIE BANQUET ON 'EM??
YOU'RE ON THE HOT SEAT TONIGHT, TORCH, IN MORE WAYS THAN ONE, IF YOU DON'T MIND A MORE LITERAL INTERPRETATION!
YE-OWWTCH!!
QUITE AN EYEFUL, WOULDN'T YOU AGREE?
I HEAR YOU STRETCH REAL GOOD, BIG BRAIN. THINK YOU CAN STRETCH AROUND MY CLAWS?
WOLVERINE, THAT'S NOT FUNNY...
SO WHO DO I LOOK LIKE? BOB HOPE?
WHAT'S WITH YOU GUYS, CYCLOPS? WHY ARE YOU ACTING LIKE THIS?
WHERE--WHERE ARE WE?
GOSH, MAGNETO MUST'VE BEEN CONTROLLING OUR MINDS!
YEAH, THAT'S IT...
BUT WE'RE FREE FROM HIS INFLUENCE NOW, THANKS TO YOU! BY GOLLY, WHAT CAN I SAY? WE'LL BE ETERNALLY GRATEFUL, THAT'S FOR SURE!
=SNICKER=
HEY, IT'S GETTING LATE! GOTTA RUN --'BYE!
HEY! MAGNETO DOESN'T CONTROL MINDS! GET BACK HERE!!


BOY, THOSE X-MEN SURE ARE BECOMING ARROGANT!
JOHNNY, YOUR BURN LOOKS PRETTY BAD!
IS THERE A DOCTOR IN THE HOUSE?
DR. STRANGE?!?
YOU WERE EXPECTING DR. OCTOPUS?
I HAVE JUST THE SPELL FOR YOU, JOHNNY STORM. IT WORKED ON KANSAS CITY ROYALS THIRD BASEMAN GEORGE BRETT, SO IT SHOULD WORK FOR YOU.
AAAAHHHH...
I CALL IT "PREPARATION S"!
NOW, DR. STRANGE REALLY ISN'T A VERY FUNNY GUY.
BUT THAT'S NOT WHY WE'RE DELETING HIS MONOLOG.
YOU SEE, UNFORTUNATELY, THE MAN IS LONG-WINDED TO A FAULT.
SUPER HEROES ARE A GENERALLY POLITE BUNCH SO THEY WON'T COMPLAIN ABOUT DOC OVERSTAYING HIS WELCOME.
AS A RESULT, HE DRONES ON AND ON...
...THE MINUTES TURNING TO HOURS...
...THE HOURS TO DAYS...
...THE DAYS TO WEEKS...
...THE WEEKS TO MON--HUH? OH, ALL RIGHT, SO MAYBE HE WASN'T TALKING THAT LONG! IT SURE SEEMED LIKE IT!
FINALLY...
...AND BY THE ALL SEEING EYE OF ALLEN FUNT, I SAY TO YOU--
GAD! FORTY MINUTES. YOU'VE BEEN TALKING FOR AN ETERNITY!!
NO MORE COFFEE, THANK YOU. IT MIGHT KEEP ME AWAKE...
ZZzz...
ZZzz...
ZZzzz...
I'M AN ETERNITY--WILL I DO?
BY THE HOARY HOSTS OF HOWARD JOHNSONS!
I'VE HEARD OF "MR. UNIVERSE," BUT THIS GUY TAKES THE CAKE!
WILL YOU FOLLOW ME, DR. STRANGE?
FROM HERE TO ETERNITY...
THERE THEY GO--GONE WITH THE WIND...

HEH HEH... AND NOW, THE MOMENT WE'VE ALL BEEN WAITING FOR--THE MAIN COURSE IS ABOUT TO BE SERVED!
ENJOY YOUR MEAL, FOLKS!
REED RICHARDS WON'T ENJOY HIS MEAL!
NOT WHEN THE MAIN COURSE IS... DEATH!
OBOY! CHICKEN!
IF I MIGHT CORRECT YOU, MASTER TORCH, THIS ISN'T MERELY CHICKEN, THIS IS ROCK CORNISH HEN, A SUCCULENT YOUNG FOWL, SERVED WITH STUFFING AND MASHED POTATOES.
PEAS WERE INCLUDED TO APPEASE THE HULK.
MMM-MMM! THIS STUFFING CERTAINLY IS DELICIOUS!
SAY, WHAT HAVE I UNCOVERED--A TOOTHPICK?...
NO! IT'S A TINY MACHINE GUN!
AND--AND IT'S FORCE FEEDING ME TINY BULLETS!
LUCKILY, THE STUFFING IS ACTING AS A SILENCER, SO MY PLIGHT WON'T ATTRACT UNDUE ATTENTION.
AS FOR THE BULLETS, I'LL JUST LET MY PLIABLE SKIN TAKE CARE OF THAT LITTLE PROBLEM.
I'LL JUST SPIT OUT THESE NOW HARMLESS SLUGS.
HMMM. REMINDS ME OF WATERMELON.
REED, WHAT WAS THAT NOISE?
NOTHING, JOHNNY, JUST A LITTLE GAS.
OH. AREN'T YOU ENJOYING YOUR CHICKEN?
YES, I AM, JOHNNY--AND THAT'S ROCK CORNISH HEN, NOT CHICKEN.

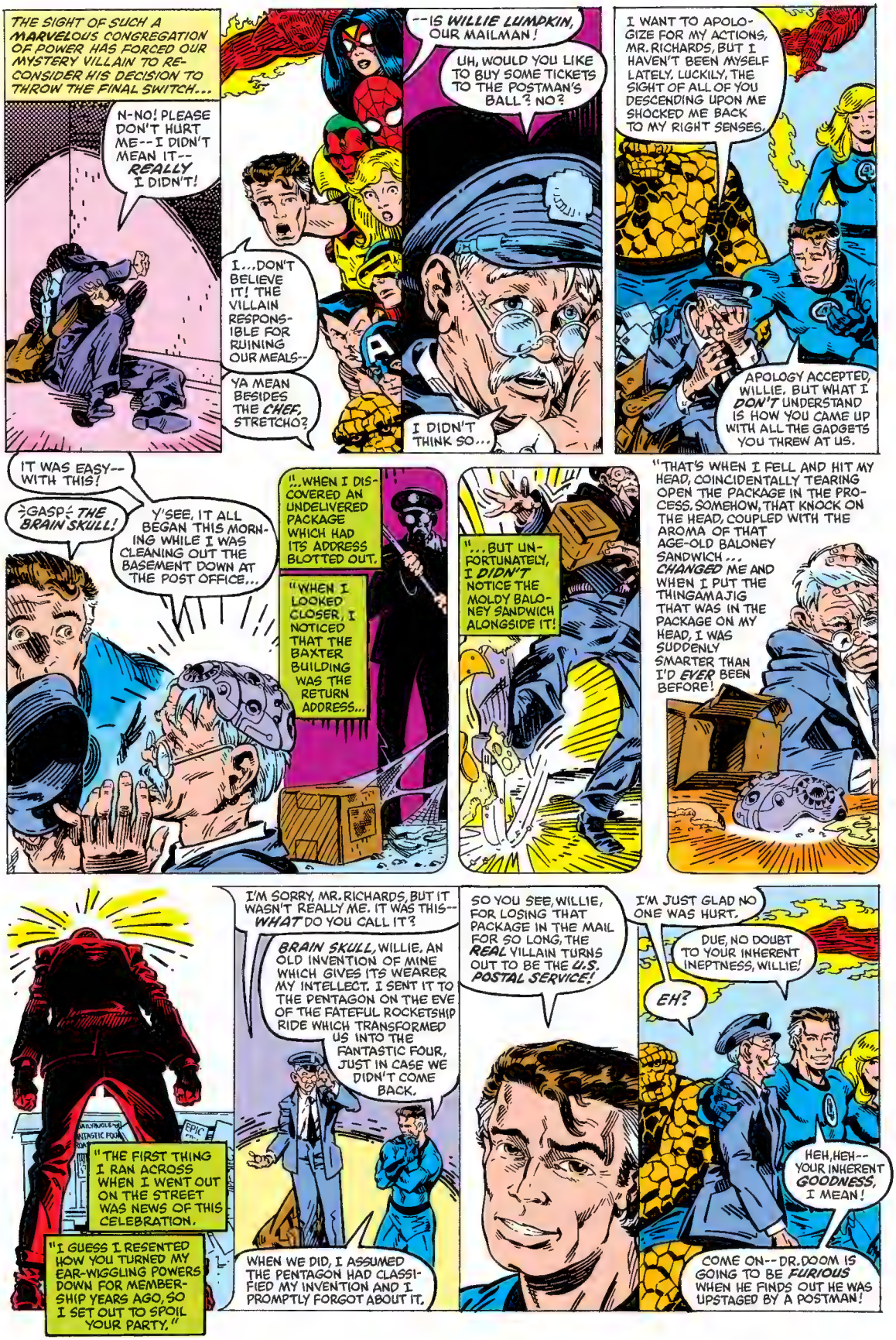
THANKS FOR THE WINE, FRENCHY!
HEY, JACK--STOP WOLFING DOWN YOUR FOOD!
GREETINGS, MORTALS--HOW THE HELL ARE YOU?
HOW'S YOUR SUPER HERO CAREER GOING, TORPEDO?
NOT SO GOOD, PALADIN--IN FACT, YOU MIGHT SAY IT'S BOMBING!
HOW TACKY--DRIVING A MOTOR-CYCLE IN HERE!
IMAGINE ME BEING SUS-PENDED FROM NIGHT SCHOOL BECAUSE I GOT 3 D'S ON MY REPORT CARD...
HEY, WHAT'S THIS CHARTER MEMBER OF HELL'S ANGELS DOING BUSTING UP OUR DINNER?
I AM KNOWN AS THE GHOST RIDER, WITLESS MORTAL, AND I CONTROL THE FEARSOME HELLFIRE!
OH, YEAH? WELL, I'VE BEEN KNOWN TO LIGHT UP A FIRE OR TWO IN MY TIME AS WELL!
NOW, I'LL ASK YOU ONE MORE TIME--WHAT'S YOUR BUSINESS HERE?
LIKE EVERYONE ELSE, I AM HERE TO ROAST THE FANTASTIC FOUR.
GIVEN MY INCLINATIONS, I'D LIKE NOTHING BETTER THAN TO TRULY ROAST THE FANTASTIC FOUR...
HOWEVER, SINCE I SENSE NO EVIL WITHIN YOU, I WON'T BE ABLE TO EXPEND MY ENERGIES IN THAT PARTICULAR DIRECTION.
BUT DESIRE FOR DESTRUC-TION MUST BE APPEASED!
I LEAVE YOU NOW, HAVING ACCOMPLISHED MY TASK...
GREAT SCOTT!
YOW!
I LIKE MY FOOD WELL DONE, BUT THIS IS RIDICULOUS...
OH, MY...
...FOR, IF I CAN'T ROAST THE FANTASTIC FOUR THEMSELVES, THEN I'LL HAVE TO BE SATISFIED WITH ROASTING THEIR CHICKENS!
THAT'S ROCK CORNISH HENS!!
GEEZ, DOESN'T ANY-BODY HAVE ANY-THING NICE TO SAY ABOUT US??

YOUR ATTENTION, EVERYONE-- BLACK BOLT HAS A MESSAGE FOR THE FANTASTIC FOUR!
AW, C'MON, MEDUSA, THAT'S NOT VERY FUNNY...
NOR WAS IT MEANT TO BE, JOHNNY STORM. BLACK BOLT IS DEADLY SERIOUS IN HIS URGENCY.
GASP! BLACK BOLT SENSES THAT SOMEONE IS TRYING TO DESTROY THE FANTASTIC FOUR!
AW, NUTS...
WHAT? AGAIN?
WE AIN'T EVEN HAD DESSERT YET!
REALLY, FOLKS, THERE'S NO NEED TO WORRY.
THAT'S RIGHT, MR. RICHARDS, NOT WHEN YOU'VE GOT NOVA AND THE NEW CHAMPIONS HERE TO HELP YOU!
SORT OF...
I AM NOT A CROOK.
SHOULD I MENTION THAT I'VE LOST MY POWERS AND THAT THE REAL NEW CHAMPIONS ARE STILL OUT IN SPACE AND THESE GUYS ARE JUST SOME OF MY HIGH SCHOOL PALS DRESSED UP SO WE COULD SNEAK IN HERE? NAH.
THE HANDS AND FEET OF SHANG-CHI, MASTER OF KUNG FU, ARE EVER AT THE SERVICE OF THE ILLUSTRIOUS FANTASTIC FOUR, NO MATTER WHAT THE PERIL MAY BE!
AND AS LONG AS WE DON'T HAVE TO WORK WITH LUKE CAGE, THE SAME GOES FOR THE SONS OF THE TIGER!
AND, EVEN THOUGH AT THE MOMENT MY COSMIC AWARENESS IS FOCUSED ON A BIKINI CONTEST ON MALIBU BEACH, CAPTAIN MARVEL IS HERE! JUST WIGGLE A HAIR ON THE BACK OF YOUR PINKY WHEN YOU NEED ME, AND I'LL BE GLAD TO AID YOU! AFTER ALL, WHO WOULDN'T?
STARLIN
WELL, KA-ZAR THE SAVAGE AND SHANNA THE SHE-DEVIL, JUST TO NAME TWO.
IT SEEMS AS IF THEY'RE PREOCCUPIED WITH OTHER MATTERS.
WE APPRECIATE YOUR SENTIMENTS, EVERYONE, BUT YOU'RE JUST ALARMING YOURSELVES-- THERE'S NO PROBLEM!
LIKE SPIT THERE AIN'T! I'M GETTING SICK AND TIRED OF YOUR "SHOW MUST GO ON" ATTITUDE, RUBBERHEAD!

WE'RE SITTIN' DUCKS UP HERE, THERE'S NO DENYIN' THAT!
FIRST JUNIOR FINDS A BOMB IN HIS SOUP, THEN SUSIE GETS A HYPNO-DISC ALONG WITH HER SALAD, AND FINALLY, STRETCHO WINDS UP LOOKIN' AT A MACHINE GUN STICKIN' OUT OF THE BACK OF A BIRD!
YOUR ICE CREAM, SIR.
THANKS...
IT DOESN'T TAKE A GENIUS TO FIGURE OUT THAT EACH COURSE OF TONIGHT'S MEAL WAS SPECIALLY PREPARED TO GIVE EACH ONE OF US A PERMANENT CASE OF FOOD POISONING, SO I--
--I--I--
Y!!--Y!!!!!....
NOT AGAIN...
CHOCOLATE, VANILLA AND STRAWBERRY--A TRIPLE THREAT, HUH?
Y'KNOW, I WAS IN PRETTY GOOD HUMOR UNTIL YOU CAME ALONG, PAL.
I'M GLAD THIS IS A WEEK-NIGHT! WHEN IT COMES TO FIGHTIN' ICE CREAM MONSTERS, I GOT ONE RULE...
NEVER ON SUNDAE!
BRUTE FORCE IS GETTING YOU NOWHERE, BEN.
YOU GOT ANY BETTER IDEAS?
HERE,
A SPOON?!?
IF YOU CAN'T BEAT 'EM, EAT 'EM!
TOO BAD YOU AIN'T MADE OUTA MINT CHOCOLATE CHIP...
OH, WELL, I'D BETTER TAKE A DEEP BREATH, BECAUSE AS MUCH AS I HATE TO ADMIT IT, LOOK OUT, WORLD--
--IT'S SLOBBERIN' TIME!!
SLURP SLURP GOBBLE GOBBLE CHOMP CHOMP YUM YUM EATUM' UP SLURP SLURP GOBBLE GOBBLE CHOMP CHOMP YUM YUM EATUM' UP EATUM' UP!
--OOOoooo--
I CAN'T BELIEVE I ATE THE WHOLE THING...
AWRIGHT--I'M MAD! BESIDES REED, THERE'S ONLY ONE OTHER GUY WITH ENOUGH ON THE BALL TO SABOTAGE OUR SUPPER--
--DR. DOOM!

WRONG, CAMEL BREATH...
DR. DOOM, DR. DOOM, DR. DOOM!! WHY IS IT THAT EVERYONE ALWAYS ASSUMES THAT DR. DOOM IS THE CULPRIT RESPONSIBLE?
WELL, IT SURE AIN'T SOUPY SALES, TIN HEAD!
CALM DOWN, SON. WE DON'T KNOW THAT FOR CERTAIN...
BAH! I SEE THAT SOME PEOPLE WILL NEVER CHANGE!
...I CHANGE EACH MORNIN', HOW ABOUT YOU, DOOMSIE?
"WHAT DID YOU DO WITH JIMMY HOFFA, DR. DOOM? WHY'D YOU SET OFF MT. ST. HELENS, DR. DOOM?"... PEOPLE BLAME ME FOR EVERYTHING!!
AND WHOSE FAULT IS THAT? I'LL TELL YOU WHO-- REED RICHARDS, THAT'S WHOSE FAULT IT IS!
LITTLE DID I SUSPECT DURING MY COLLEGE DAYS THAT MY ROOMMATE WOULD BE RESPONSIBLE FOR RUINING MY LIFE!
I REMEMBER THAT FATEFUL NIGHT AS IF IT WERE YESTERDAY!
RICHARDS AND HIS COHORTS WENT OFF ON A PANTY RAID OF THE CAPA-ALPHA SORORITY HOUSE, AND THEY DIDN'T INVITE ME!
IMAGINE THAT! THE NERVE OF THEM!
INSTEAD, I WENT OFF TO MY LABORATORY TO WORK ON A VERY COMPLICATED AND DANGEROUS EXPERIMENT. BUT RICHARDS' CALLOUS ACTIONS HAD UPSET ME MORE THAN I HAD REALIZED, SO WHEN I MADE ONE SMALL MISTAKE--
BOOM.
IF I HAD BEEN IN ON THAT PANTY RAID, THE DR. DOOM YOU SEE BEFORE YOU TODAY WOULD NOT EXIST! I COULD HAVE BEEN A FUN GUY!!
AS IT IS, EVERYONE SEEMS TO THINK I'M A DRAG!
WHEW! I THINK I'LL BE DOING EVERYONE A FAVOR IF I END THIS PARTY NOW!
THAT DR. DOOM IS SUCH A DRAG...
OH, NO.
I DIDN'T JUST SEE A SHADOWY FIGURE FLIP THE PROVERBIAL SWITCH, DID I?
I'M AFRAID I DID. =SIGH=
UH, MAY I HAVE YOUR ATTENTION, EVERYONE? WE SEEM TO HAVE A BIT OF A PROBLEM--
--AND DR. DOOM HAD NOTHING TO DO WITH IT, YOU UNDERSTAND?
--WE'RE UNDER ATTACK! ANYONE WHO'S FINISHED WITH THEIR DINNER, AND WOULD CARE TO HELP US FEEL FREE.
I HOPE YOU LOSE!
WHAT DO YA THINK?
WHY NOT?
AW, GO RUST!
OKAY.
JUST LET ME FINISH MY COFFEE...

C'MON, EVERYBODY-- LET'S BEAT THE STUFFING OUT OF THIS PARTY POOPER!


THE SIGHT OF SUCH A MARVELOUS CONGREGATION OF POWER HAS FORCED OUR MYSTERY VILLAIN TO RE-CONSIDER HIS DECISION TO THROW THE FINAL SWITCH...
N-NO! PLEASE DON'T HURT ME--I DIDN'T MEAN IT-- REALLY I DIDN'T!
--IS WILLIE LUMPKIN, OUR MAILMAN!
UH, WOULD YOU LIKE TO BUY SOME TICKETS TO THE POSTMAN'S BALL? NO?
I...DON'T BELIEVE IT! THE VILLAIN RESPONSIBLE FOR RUINING OUR MEALS--
YA MEAN BESIDES THE CHEF, STRETCHO?
I DIDN'T THINK SO...
I WANT TO APOLOGIZE FOR MY ACTIONS, MR. RICHARDS, BUT I HAVEN'T BEEN MYSELF LATELY. LUCKILY, THE SIGHT OF ALL OF YOU DESCENDING UPON ME SHOCKED ME BACK TO MY RIGHT SENSES.
APOLOGY ACCEPTED, WILLIE. BUT WHAT I DON'T UNDERSTAND IS HOW YOU CAME UP WITH ALL THE GADGETS YOU THREW AT US.
IT WAS EASY-- WITH THIS!
GASP! THE BRAIN SKULL!
Y'SEE, IT ALL BEGAN THIS MORNING WHILE I WAS CLEANING OUT THE BASEMENT DOWN AT THE POST OFFICE...
"...WHEN I DISCOVERED AN UNDELIVERED PACKAGE WHICH HAD ITS ADDRESS BLOTTED OUT.
"WHEN I LOOKED CLOSER, I NOTICED THAT THE BAXTER BUILDING WAS THE RETURN ADDRESS...
"...BUT UNFORTUNATELY, I DIDN'T NOTICE THE MOLDY BALONEY SANDWICH ALONGSIDE IT!
"THAT'S WHEN I FELL AND HIT MY HEAD, COINCIDENTALLY TEARING OPEN THE PACKAGE IN THE PROCESS. SOMEHOW, THAT KNOCK ON THE HEAD, COUPLED WITH THE AROMA OF THAT AGE-OLD BALONEY SANDWICH... CHANGED ME AND WHEN I PUT THE THINGAMAJIG THAT WAS IN THE PACKAGE ON MY HEAD, I WAS SUDDENLY SMARTER THAN I'D EVER BEEN BEFORE!
"I GUESS I RESENTED HOW YOU TURNED MY EAR-WIGGLING POWERS DOWN FOR MEMBERSHIP YEARS AGO, SO I SET OUT TO SPOIL YOUR PARTY."
"THE FIRST THING I RAN ACROSS WHEN I WENT OUT ON THE STREET WAS NEWS OF THIS CELEBRATION.
I'M SORRY, MR. RICHARDS, BUT IT WASN'T REALLY ME. IT WAS THIS-- WHAT DO YOU CALL IT?
BRAIN SKULL, WILLIE. AN OLD INVENTION OF MINE WHICH GIVES ITS WEARER MY INTELLECT. I SENT IT TO THE PENTAGON ON THE EVE OF THE FATEFUL ROCKETSHIP RIDE WHICH TRANSFORMED US INTO THE FANTASTIC FOUR, JUST IN CASE WE DIDN'T COME BACK.
WHEN WE DID, I ASSUMED THE PENTAGON HAD CLASSIFIED MY INVENTION AND I PROMPTLY FORGOT ABOUT IT.
SO YOU SEE, WILLIE, FOR LOSING THAT PACKAGE IN THE MAIL FOR SO LONG, THE REAL VILLAIN TURNS OUT TO BE THE U.S. POSTAL SERVICE!
I'M JUST GLAD NO ONE WAS HURT.
DUE, NO DOUBT TO YOUR INHERENT INEPTNESS, WILLIE!
EH?
HEH, HEH-- YOUR INHERENT GOODNESS, I MEAN!
COME ON-- DR. DOOM IS GOING TO BE FURIOUS WHEN HE FINDS OUT HE WAS UPSTAGED BY A POSTMAN!

GOT THINGS ALL TAKEN CARE OF? GOOD! NOW CAN WE PLEASE GET ON WITH THE SHOW? DR. STRANGE TO THE CONTRARY, THIS HALL ISN'T RENTED FOR ALL ETERNITY! THINGS ARE RUNNING SO FAR BEHIND IT LOOKS LIKE WE'RE ONLY GOING TO GET TO HEAR SHORT COMMENTS FROM THE REST OF TODAY'S SPEAKERS.
SO WITHOUT FURTHER ADO, ALLOW ME TO INTRODUCE--
FORGET THE TORCH--
--THIS IS THE CLOWN I SHOULD SPRITZ WITH SELZER!
"--THE TORCH'S OLD COLLEGE ROOMMATE, WYATT WINGFOOT AND TOMAZOOMA, THE LIVING TOTEM!
...AND NOWADAYS ON THE RESERVATION I SHARE A ROOMA WITH TOMA-ZOOMA--
I'M STILL HUNGRY...
"...YOUNG FRANKLIN'S NANNY, AND THE F.F.'S RESIDENT WITCH, AGATHA HARKNESS!
ALTHOUGH I WORKED FOR THE F.F. FOR YEARS, I WAS NEVER ABLE TO CONVINCE THEM TO HIRE MY SISTER AS THEIR MAID.
--A FACT SHE NEVER LET'S ME FORGET.
OLD WITCH HAZEL ALWAYS RUBS IT IN...
"...THE INHUMAN, CRYSTAL, THE FIRST GIRL JOHNNY STORM EVER TRULY LOVED, AND THE EX-AVENGER QUICKSILVER, THE MAN SHE DUMPED JOHNNY TO MARRY!
HEY, I DON'T THINK THAT'S VERY FAIR!
OH, EVERY-THING'S CLEAR, CRYSTAL-- CRYSTAL CLEAR!!
"UH, I THINK WE'D BETTER MOVE ON TO...
"...THE MYSTERIOUS MOON KNIGHT!
THANKS FOR COMING, CAPED CRUSADER!
WATCH THAT "CAPED CRUSADER" CRAP, PLASTIC GUY!
IF THIS WASN'T A MIXED AUDIENCE, I'D MOON YOU ALL!
"...THE SAVAGE SHE-HULK AND SPIDER-WOMAN!
WHAT DO YOU THINK ABOUT THE F.F., SPIDER-WOMAN?
WHO CARES? I WANT TO KNOW MORE ABOUT FRANKIE RAYE, THE SENSA-TIONAL SHE-TORCH!
YEAH! SHE'S OUR KIND OF WOMAN!
"...THE ASTONISHING AUNT MAY!
AH...AH... AHH...
TORCHIE-- NO!!
NO NO NO! ANT MAN--THE ASTONISHING ANT MAN! ...SHEESH...
"...HOWARD THE DUCK AND THAT MUCK ENCRUSTED MOCKERY OF A COMEDIAN, THE MAN-THING!
MANNY ASKED ME TO TELL YOU THAT WHOSOEVER KNOWS LAUGHTER WILL BURN AT THE MAN-THING'S TOUCH!
I SEE EVERYONE AROUND HERE IS SAFE...
"...THUNDRA AND TIGRA, FORMER COHORTS OF THE F.F., AND POTENTIAL PARAMOURS OF BENJAMIN J. GRIMM!
I HOPE YOU'VE GOT NINE LIVES--YOU'LL NEED 'EM!
ROCKY'S MINE!
I'LL SCRATCH YOUR EYES OUT!
I'LL KNOCK YOUR BLOCK OFF!
GIRLS! GIRLS! PLEASE! I KNOW I'M IRRESISTIBLE, BUT--
OH, SHUT UP!!

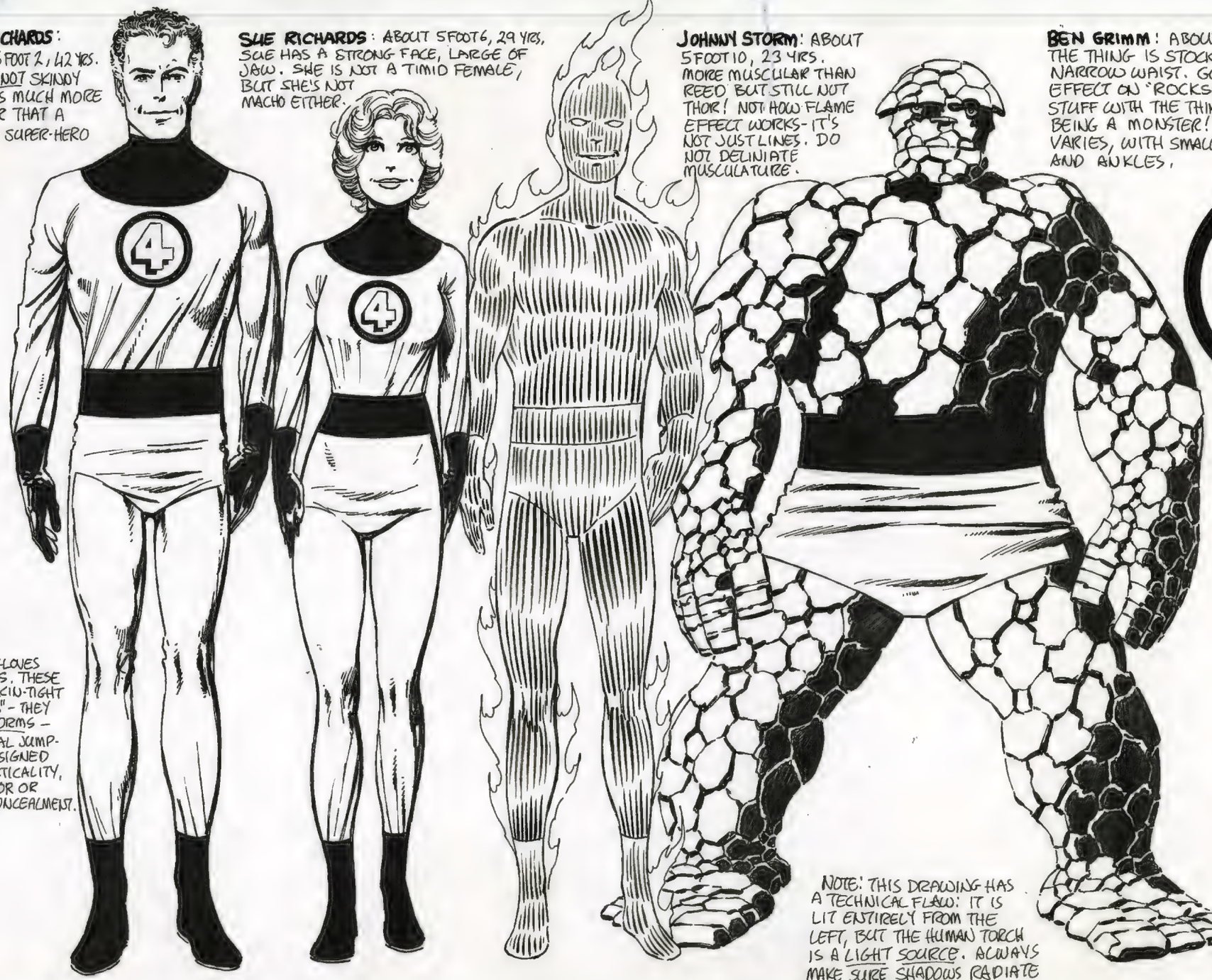
"...HERODOM'S ANSWER TO DONNA SUMMER, THE DAZZLER!
FOR MY NUMBER TONIGHT, I'M GOING TO SING-- WHAT ELSE?--A TORCH SONG!
WHY COULDN'T IT BE FRANK SINATRA WHO HAD THE SUPER POWERS...?
"...FROM THE FAR FUTURE, STARHAWK AND THE GUARDIANS OF THE GALAXY!
C'MON, BABY, LIGHT MY FIRE!
WE'RE VERY PROUD TO PAY TRIBUTE TO FOUR OF HISTORY'S MOST FANTASTIC HEROES HERE TODAY--
--WHILE THERE'S STILL TIME!
YOU-- YOU KNOW SOMETHING WE DON'T?!?
"...BROTHER VOODOO!
IT'S NOT COMMONLY KNOWN, BUT I ALSO SING. AND SING I SHALL, AS SOON AS I DECIDE WHICH SONG TO FAVOR YOU WITH--
--"NEEDLES AND PINS"--
--OR "HELLO, DOLLY"!
"...DIRECT FROM THE PLANET POPPUP, THE IMPOSSIBLE MAN!
LOOK, BEN, I'VE USED MY SHAPE CHANGING ABILITIES TO TURN MYSELF INTO YOUR BIGGEST FAN!
ONE WAY OR ANOTHER, IMPY, I ALWAYS SAID YOU WERE A BLOWHARD...
"...AND IN THE GUISE OF CAPTAIN UNIVERSE, THE SUPER HERO WHO COULD BE YOU, IS THE ASTONISHING AUNT MAY! (THIS TIME FOR SURE...)
ISN'T IT TIME FOR MILK AND COOKIES YET, DEAR?
UH, NO, NOT QUITE YET, MRS. PARKER. FIRST WE'LL HAVE TO GIVE THE ROASTEES A CHANCE TO ANSWER THE ROASTERS!
HOWABOUT IT, TORCH?
ADMIT IT--YOU ALL THINK YOU'RE PRETTY FUNNY, RIGHT? YOU REALLY ENJOYED BEING COMEDIANS AT OUR EXPENSE!
BUT PARDON ME, FOLKS, IF 1001 VARIATIONS OF "HOT" JOKES ISN'T MY IDEA OF AN EVENING OF SOPHISTICATED HUMOR.
YOU GUYS TRIED THOUGH, AND THAT'S WHAT REALLY COUNTS, SO AS A LITTLE MEMENTO OF THIS EVENING'S ENTERTAINMENT--
--I, GENEROUS SOUL THAT I AM, VOLUNTEER TO AWARD TO ALL THOSE WHO DESERVE IT (AND THAT'S MOST OF YOU)--
--YOUR OWN PERSONAL HOTFOOT!
NO, NO, DON'T THANK ME-- I KNOW HOW MUCH YOU ALL LIKE THAT SORT OF THING...

WE ALL KNOW THAT BEN IS A TOUGH GUY, JOHNNY HAS A HOT TEMPER, AND THAT SUE CAN BE TERRIBLY SHY AT TIMES, BUT WHAT ABOUT ME, REED RICHARDS?
WELL, SOME PEOPLE THINK I'M ABSENT-MINDED, WITH MY HEAD UP IN THE CLOUDS ALL THE TIME...
NOW HOW'D THEY EVER GET AN IDEA LIKE THAT?!?
REALLY, FOLKS, I'M JUST AN EASYGOING, FLEXIBLE KIND OF GUY.
I'D HAVE TO BE, TO BE ABLE TO PUT ON A BIG SMILE AFTER WHAT I'VE LEARNED HERE TODAY!
LITTLE DID I SUSPECT THAT LURKING UNDER DR. DOOM'S ARMOR WAS DON RICKLES!
WITH BEN, "IT'S CLOBBERIN' TIME!" AND JOHNNY, AS YOU KNOW, TURNS HIS "FLAME ON."
ME, WELL, I'VE NEVER REALLY HAD THE NEED FOR A BATTLE CRY.
UNTIL TONIGHT, THAT IS!
AFTER HEARING ALL THAT'S BEEN SAID ABOUT US HERE, THERE'S NOTHING I'D RATHER DO THAN--
--FADE OUT!!
'BYE!
I'D LIKE TO SAY A THING OR TWO ABOUT THE THINGS WE'VE SAID TODAY!
SOMETHING--ANYTHING WOULDA BEEN BETTER THAN SOME OF THE GRIM ATTEMPTS AT HUMOR I HEARD HERE TONIGHT. WE SHOULD SUE...
BUT IF I READ YOU RIGHT, I SHOULDN'T KICK UP A STORM OVER YER COMMENTS, CUZ THINGS COULDA BEEN WORSE.
ANYWAY, WHAT CAN I SAY, BUT THINGS FOR THE MEMORIES!
"THINGS FOR THE MEMORIES"?!?
JUST ANOTHER SILLY JOKE.
BLACK BOLT HAS HEARD THEM ALL TONIGHT, AND THOUGH HE'S SMILED OFTEN, HE HASN'T LAUGHED ONCE.
YET EVERY MAN HAS HIS BREAKING POINT, EVEN THE KING OF THE INHUMANS.
BLACK BOLT--NO! IT WASN'T THAT FUNNY!
BUT IT'S TOO LATE FOR CONSIDERATIONS OF MERIT. THE CHAIN REACTION HAS BEGUN!
HEH
BLACK BOLT LAUGHS!
HA HA!

--AND WHEN BLACK BOLT LAUGHS--
..UH OH..
I'D LIKE TO THANK EVERYONE FOR COMING TONIGHT...
I'M NOT LETTING ANYTHING MESS UP MY NEW HAIRDO...
HAHAHAHAHAHAHAHA
--HE REALLY BRINGS THE HOUSE DOWN!!
--EXCEPT FOR MAYBE BLACK BOLT...
HA HA - heh -- heh -- heh -- oops...
BUT BEFORE WE END THE FESTIVITIES, AHEM, I'D LIKE TO SAY A FEW WORDS ABOUT THE GUESTS OF HONOR.
SUE, WHY DIDN'T YOU SHIELD US, TOO?
YOU DIDN'T ASK...
AS WE ALL KNOW, THREE'S COMPANY, AND FOUR'S A CROWD! THE FANTASTIC FOUR, OF COURSE, IS THE WORLD'S GREATEST CROWD...
...FURTHERMORE, THE VAST CONTRIBUTION THESE FOUR HAVE MADE TO MANKIND IS IMMEASURABLE, NOT SINCE DOLLY PARTON DONATED HER TIME TO THE LUNG ASSOCIATION HAS THERE BEEN COMPARABLE ACTION TAKEN...
...WHICH REMINDS ME OF THE TIME BEN PROPOSED TO A LEADING WOMAN PSYCHOLOGIST. UNFORTUNATELY, SHE TURNED HIM DOWN, OR ELSE TODAY SHE'D BE KNOWN AS DR. JOYCE BROTHERS GRIMM...
WELL, AT LEAST THE FOOD WAS GOOD...
END

THIS IS PROBABLY THE SILLIEST COMIC BOOK THE FANTASTIC FOUR HAVE EVER APPEARED IN. BUT SILLINESS ISN'T ANYTHING NEW TO THE F.F. IT SHOULD BE NOTED THAT BESIDES THE MANY OTHER TRAIL-BLAZING TECHNIQUES THEY INTRODUCED VIA THE FANTASTIC FOUR, STAN LEE AND JACK KIRBY GAVE US CHARACTERS WHO WERE CAPABLE OF LAUGHING AT THEMSELVES.
WHAP!
IN THAT SAME ISSUE, REED TURNS DOWN ANOTHER IN A LONG LINE OF APPLICANTS BENT ON MAKING THE F.F. REDESIGN THEIR INSIGNIAS.
DON'T BELIEVE ME? YOU WILL AFTER YOU PERUSE THESE EXAMPLES I'VE REPRODUCED FROM THE TEAM'S EARLY DAYS.
IN F.F.#11 THE THING LEARNS THAT YOU NEVER LOOK A GIFT HORSE IN THE MOUTH--ESPECIALLY IF IT'S FROM THE YANCY STREET GANG!
BY THE WAY, MR. RICHARDS, ARE YOU LOOKING TO HIRE ANY NEW MEMBERS FOR YOUR GROUP? I HAVEN'T EXACTLY GOT ANY SUPER POWERS, BUT I CAN WIGGLE MY EARS REAL GOOD, AND--
WE'RE ALL FILLED UP RIGHT NOW, LUMPY, BUT WE'LL KEEP YOU IN MIND, OLD TIMER!
WE ALL KNOW WHAT HAPPENED TO WILLIE LUMPKIN, DON'T WE?
THING, YOU'VE GOT A BI-I-I-G MOUTH!!
GULMMP!
WHAT A DIGNIFIED GUY.
BEN FOUND OUT IN F.F.#29 THAT IF YOU'RE GOING TO SHOOT YOUR MOUTH OFF ON YANCY STREET, IT'S BEST NOT TO STAND UNDER FALLING GARBAGE CANS!
WHAT ABOUT THAT TIME IN F.F.#16 WHEN DR. DOOM'S SHRINKING RAY WAS MYSTERIOUSLY ZAPPING THE GROUP? BEN WAS SO EMBARRASSED THAT HE HID IN REED'S GUINEA PIG CAGE UNTIL HE COULD FIGURE OUT WHAT WAS GOING ON!
RELAX, CHARLIE! I DON'T WANNA TAKE YOUR BLAMED BEETLE NUT! I JUST WANNA HANG AROUND HERE TILL I WAKE UP OR SOMETHIN'!
THIS IS AN IDOL OF MILLIONS?? SHEESH!
OR HOWABOUT THE TIME IN F.F.#9 WHEN THE GROUP WENT BANKRUPT, THEIR ONLY CHANCE OF SALVATION BEING A TRIP TO HOLLYWOOD? ONLY, THEY DIDN'T HAVE THE CARFARE, SO--
I'LL STAY OUT OF SIGHT BACK HERE, SO I DON'T SCARE ANYONE AWAY!
SOMEONE'LL STOP SOONER OR LATER!
DON'T BE EMBARRASSED! WE'LL ALL LAUGH ABOUT THIS ONE DAY!
I HOPE SO!
I GUESS I SHOULDN'T HAVE BLOWN MY STACK, BABY, BUT WHENEVER I THINK OF THOSE YANCY CRUMB-BUMS, I SEE RED!
IMAGINE THOSE CREEPS SENDIN' ME A BEATLE WIG!!!
WHY DON'T YOU JUST THROW IT AWAY, BEN?
ARE YOU KIDDIN'?? I ALWAYS WANTED TO TRY ONE!
WISH YOU COULD SEE ME, BABY! I'M A LIVIN' DOLL!!
MY FAVORITE BIT OCCURRED IN #34, WHICH CAME OUT AT THE HEIGHT OF BEATLEMANIA WHEN THE THING GOT YET ANOTHER GIFT FROM THE YANCY STREET GANG...
SO, STAN AND JACK, WE'D JUST LIKE TO THANK YOU AND THE FANTASTIC FOUR FOR OVER 100 ISSUES OF THRILLS, CHILLS, CHUCKLES, AND GUFFAWS! THIS ONE'S BEEN FOR YOU GUYS! 'NUFF SAID!

Fantastic Four model sheet
by John Byrne



REED RICHARDS: ABOUT 6 FOOT 2, 42 YRS. REED IS NOT SKINNY BUT HE IS MUCH MORE ANGULAR THAT A TYPICAL SUPER-HERO

SUE RICHARDS: ABOUT 5FOOT6, 29 YRS, SUE HAS A STRONG FACE, LARGE OF JAW. SHE IS NOT A TIMID FEMALE, BUT SHE'S NOT NACHO EITHER.

JOHNNY STORM: ABOUT 5FOOT10, 23 YRS. MORE MUSCULAR THAN REED BUT STILL NOT THOR! NOT HOW FLAME EFFECT WORKS- IT'S NOT JUST LINES. DO NOT DELINIATE MUSCULATURE.

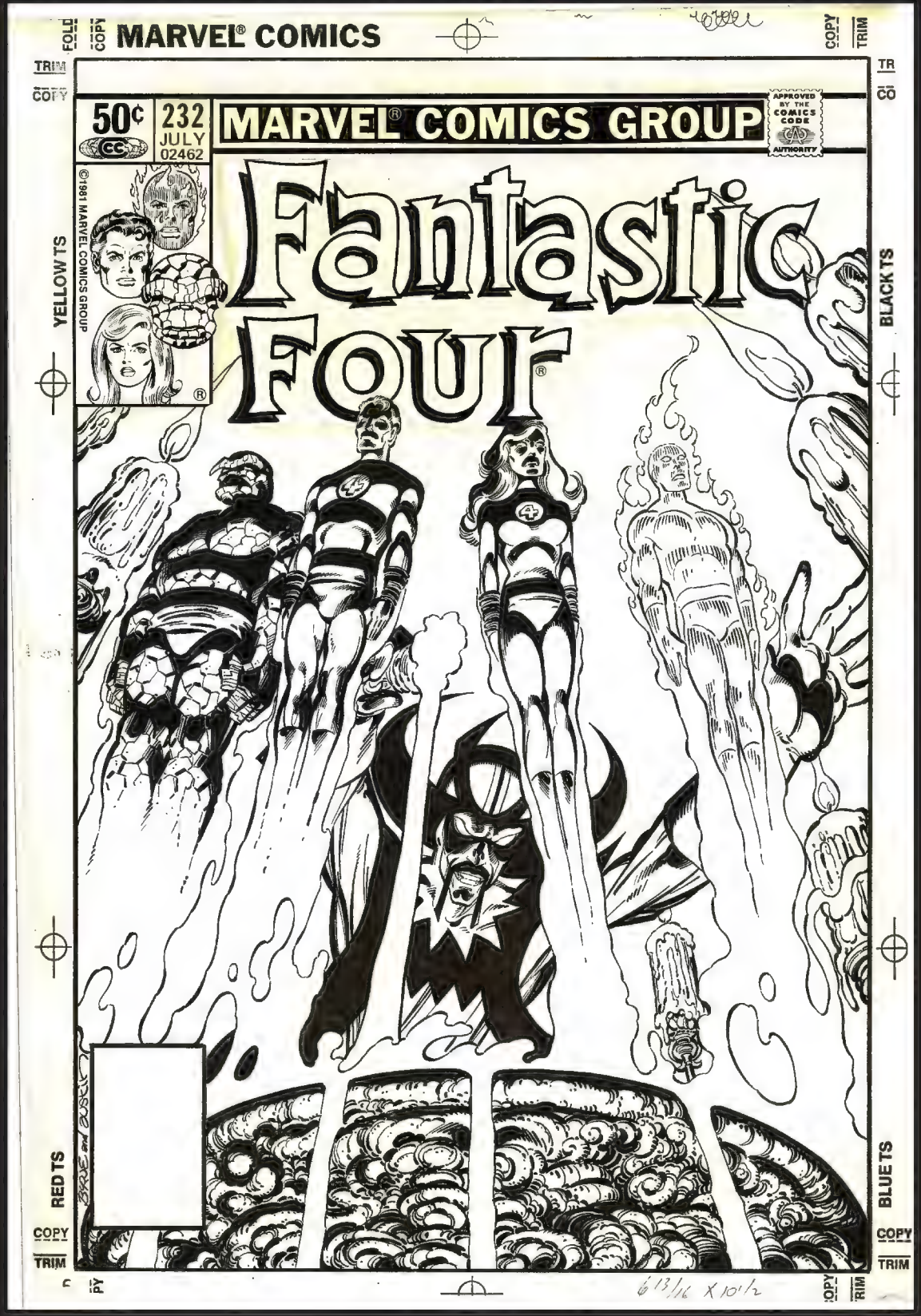
BEN GRIMM: ABOUT 5FOOT10, 38 YRS. THE THING IS STOCKY - BUT NOTE RELATIVELY NARROW WAIST. GO FOR OVERLAPPING EFFECT ON "ROCKS". DO NOT DO GOOFY STUFF WITH THE THING! HE DOESN'T LIKE BEING A MONSTER! NOTE HOW ROCK SIZE VARIES, WITH SMALLER SLABS AT WRISTS AND ANKLES.

BECAUSE OF THE DROP-SHADOW EFFECT THE "4" IS SLIGHTLY OFF-CENTER, UP AND TO THE RIGHT.

"SHORT" GLOVES AND BOOTS. THESE ARE NOT SKIN-TIGHT "COSTUMES" - THEY ARE UNIFORMS - FUNCTIONAL JUMP-SUITS, DESIGNED FOR PRACTICALITY, NOT GLAMOR OR IDENTITY CONCEALMENT.

NOTE: THIS DRAWING HAS A TECHNICAL FLAW: IT IS LIT ENTIRELY FROM THE LEFT, BUT THE HUMAN TORCH IS A LIGHT SOURCE. ALWAYS MAKE SURE SHADOWS RADIATE AWAY FROM HIM.

The Fantastic Four #232 cover original art
by John Byrne & Terry Austin



The Fantastic Four #232, page 1 original art
by John Byrne

FANTASTIC FOUR 232

Reed Richards! Ben Grimm! Sue Richards! Johnny Storm! Together they braved the unknown terrors of outer space and were changed into something more than human! MR. FANTASTIC! THE THING! THE INVISIBLE GIRL! THE HUMAN TORCH! And now the world will never again be the same!

Stan Lee PRESENTS: THE FANTASTIC FOUR!®

JOHN BYRNE WORDS & PICTURES / BJORN HEYN INKS / JIM NOVAK LETTERS / GLYNIS WEIN COLORS / JIM SALICRUP EDITOR / JIM SHOOTER EDITOR-IN-CHIEF

BACK TO THE BASICS!

THE FANTASTIC FOUR -- MY OLD AND MUCH VAUNTED FOES -- SHALL SOON LEARN WHO IS TRULY MOST POWERFUL!

SOON I SHALL DESTROY THEM AS EASILY AS I HAVE CONJURED THEIR IMAGES.

THE ARCANE POTIONS FILL THE AIR WITH THEIR NOXIOUS FUMES, AND CANDLE LIGHT GLIMMERS IN EYES NOT A LITTLE MAD.

HE IS CALLED DIABLO, AND HE IS MASTER OF THE ARTS ALCHEMICAL.

FANTASTIC FOUR® Vol. 1, No. 232, July, 1981. (U.S.P.S. 539-910) Published by MARVEL COMICS GROUP, James E. Galton, President. Stan Lee, Publisher. Michael Hobson, Vice-President, Publishing. Milton Schiffman, Vice-President, Production. OFFICE OF PUBLICATION: 575 MADISON AVENUE, NEW YORK, N.Y. 10022. Controlled Circulation postage paid at Sparta, Illinois. Published monthly. Copyright© 1981 by Marvel Comics Group, a division of Cadence Industries Corporation. All rights reserved. Price 50¢ per copy in the U.S. and Canada. Subscription rate $6.00 for 12 issues. Canada, $7.00. Foreign, $8.00. Printed in the U.S.A. No similarity between any of the names, characters, persons, and/or institutions in this magazine with those of any living or dead person or institution is intended, and any such similarity which may exist is purely coincidental. This periodical may not be sold except by authorized dealers and is sold subject to the conditions that it shall not be sold or distributed with any part of its cover or markings removed, nor in a mutilated condition. FANTASTIC FOUR (including all prominent characters featured in the issue), and the distinctive likenesses thereof, are trademarks of the MARVEL COMICS GROUP. Postmaster: Send address changes to Subscription Dept., Marvel Comics Group, 575 Madison Avenue, New York, N.Y. 10022.

The Fantastic Four #232, page 3 original art
by John Byrne

THE FANTASTIC FOUR
232
3
AND ON THAT OMINOUS NOTE, WE TURN OUR GAZE NORTHWARDS, TO ONE OF MANHATTAN'S MOST EXCLUSIVE BEAUTY SALONS...
Casa Tindolini
AND ONE OF ITS MOST FAMOUS CLIENTS, SUSAN STORM RICHARDS, THE INVISIBLE GIRL...
SUZIE, BABY, THIS NEW CUT IS GONNA MAKE YOU LOOK TWENTY YEARS YOUNGER!
WONDERFUL, MILO. I'M SURE MY HUSBAND WILL LOVE BEING MARRIED TO A CHILD!
OOH, AREN'T WE JUST TOO CUTTING TODAY! HERE, LET ME COMB IT OUT AND YOU'LL SEE FOR YOURSELF!
ISN'T THE VERONICA LAKE LOOK A TRIFLE PASSÉ, MILO?
JUST THEN...
OH, MISTER TINDOLINI, LOOK! SOMETHING'S HAPPENING TO THE CONSTRUCTION SITE OUT ON THE STREET!
WEIRD! WHAT COULD MAKE ALL THOSE ROCKS AND DIRT FLY INTO THE AIR LIKE THAT?
WHAT INDEED...
HEAR ME, HUMANS!
I AM COME FOR SHE WHO IS THE INVISIBLE GIRL!
WOE BETIDE THOSE WHO STAND IN MY WAY!

The Fantastic Four #232, page 5 original art
by John Byrne

THE FANTASTIC FOUR
6
ELSEWHERE, A FEW SHORT BLOCKS TO THE SOUTH, AND A FEW MINUTES AGO, A MATINEE CROWD LEAVES A BROADWAY THEATRE...
ELEPHANT MAN
ELEPHANT MAN
TAXI
...LARGELY UNAWARE OF TWO CELEBRITIES IN THEIR MIDST...
...BEN GRIMM, THE INCREDIBLY POWERFUL THING, AND HIS LADY LOVE, FAMED BLIND SCULPTRESS ALICIA MASTERS.
OH, BEN, WASN'T THAT A WONDERFUL PLAY? SO TERRIBLY SAD AND YET SO BEAUTIFUL.
YEAH, IT :SNIF: HAD ITS MOMENTS...
AW, CRUMBS! WHAT A LOUSY TIME FER IT TO START RAININ'!
RAINING? WHAT ARE YOU TALKING ABOUT?
IT ISN'T RAINING, BEN!
HOLY COW, SHE'S RIGHT! THE REST OF THE STREET IS BONE DRY! IT'S ONLY RAININ' ON ME!
BEN? BEN, WHAT IS IT? WHAT'S HAPPENING?
BEFORE THE STARTLED THING CAN ANSWER, THE "RAIN" CHANGES TO SOMETHING FAR WORSE...
GLUB!
A BUBBLE OF WATER! IT'S ALL AROUND ME-- MOVIN' WHEN I MOVE-- I'LL DROWN UNLESS...
BEN! PLEASE! WHAT'S WRONG? WHY DON'T YOU ANSWER?
I WAS BREATHIN' OUT WHEN THIS THING HIT ME-- NO MORE'N A COUPLA SECONDS OF AIR LEFT...!
GOTTA KEEP CALM-- IF I PANIC I'M DONE FOR!
MAYBE-- IF I DIG UP THE SIDEWALK I CAN FIND AIR-- FIND A WAY OUT...

The Fantastic Four #232, page 10 original art
by John Byrne

THE FANTASTIC FOUR 232 14
AT THE LAST POSSIBLE MOMENT...
...THE INCREDIBLY ELASTIC BODY OF MR. FANTASTIC SNAPS OUT LIKE A GREAT SAIL...
...RIDING THE SLIGHT, SLUGGISH BREEZES THAT WAFT THROUGH THE HEAVY CITY AIR.
THAT THING WILL BE AFTER ME MOMENTARILY. I MUST LURE IT AWAY FROM THE SURROUNDING BUILDINGS. ONE STRAY FLAME AND HALF THE CITY COULD BE GUTTED. BUT, WHERE...?
THE PARK! OF COURSE!
IT'S A WIDE OPEN SPACE, AND THE NEW SPRING LEAVES ARE TOO DAMP TO CREATE MUCH OF A FIRE THREAT...
BUT-- FLYING ISN'T WHAT ONE WOULD CALL MY FORTE-- AND THERE'S HARDLY ANY UPLIFT...
HIS BODY ACHING AS HE STRUGGLES TO MANEUVER, REED GLIDES OVER CENTRAL PARK...
...AND HIS FIERY PURSUER IS BUT SECONDS BEHIND!
PROFESSOR RICHARDS! HELP! OH, PLEASE HELP!
IT'S THE GIRL JOHNNY SAID HE WAS MEETING, FRANKIE... SOMETHING...
FRANKIE, WHERE'S JOHNNY? IS HE...
HE'S OVER BEYOND THOSE ROCKS, OH, HURRY PLEASE, THERE'S SOME KIND OF... OF WIND THING...
I THINK IT'S KILLING HIM!
"WIND THING?" THEN MY FIRST ANALYSIS WAS CORRECT. OUR ATTACKERS ARE EMBODIMENTS OF THE FOUR ELEMENTS. FIRE ATTACKED ME. NOW AIR IS ATTACKING JOHNNY.
EARTH AND WATER MUST BE AFTER BEN AND SUE. BUT-- WHICH TO WHICH?
NO TIME TO WORRY ABOUT THAT NOW!
JOHNNY! FLAME ON IF YOU CAN! GET CLEAR!
REED!
RICHARDS! BUT MY FIERY BROTHER SHOULD HAVE FINISHED YOU BY NOW!

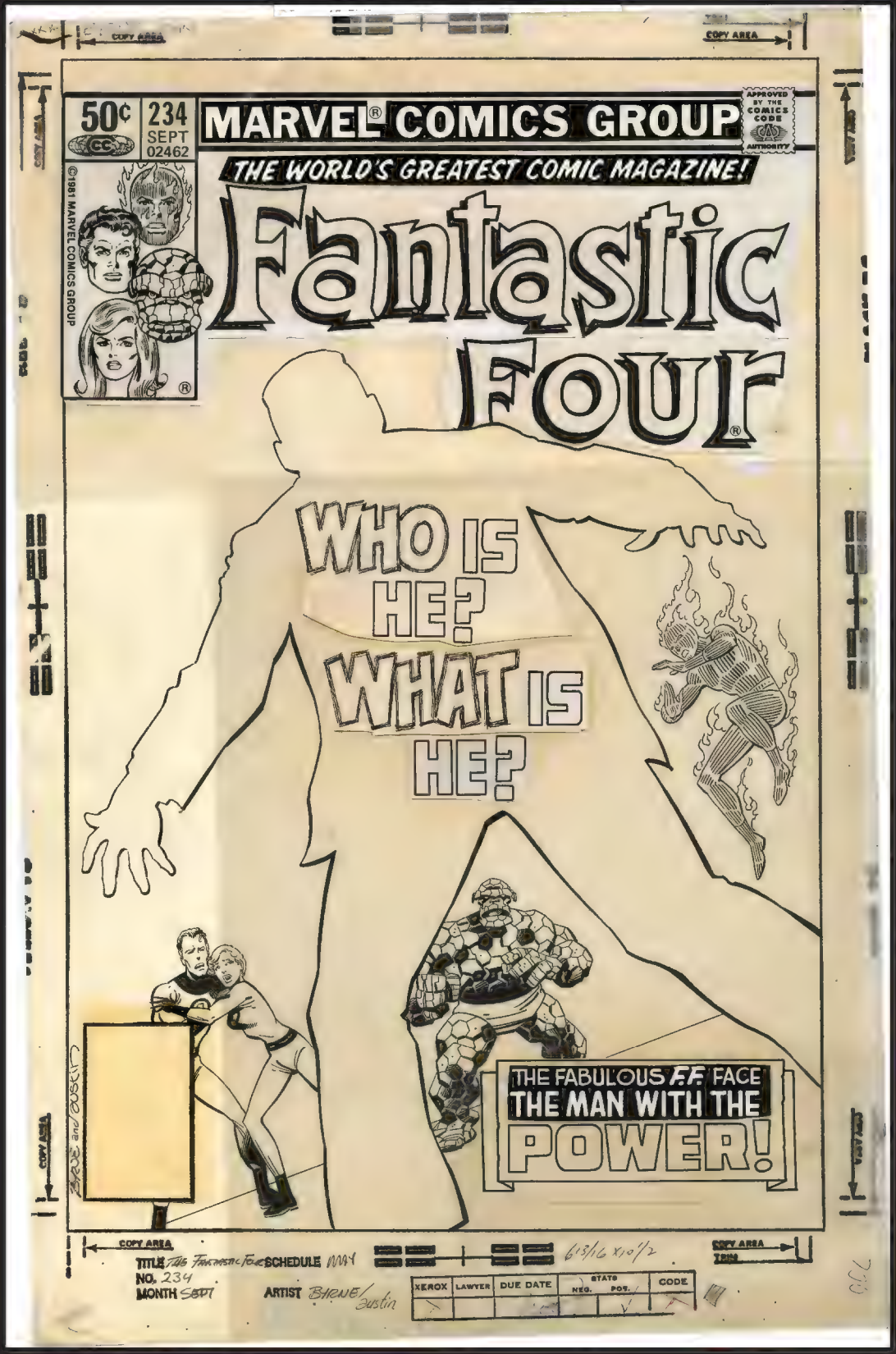
The Fantastic Four #232, page 12 original art
by John Byrne

THE FANTASTIC FOUR 232 16
NOW, I SIMPLY PRETEND TO FLEE, AND HOPEFULLY THE OVERCONFIDENCE OF THESE CREATURES WILL SET THE STAGE FOR THEIR UNDOING.
FLEE IF YOU WISH, RICHARDS.
MY FIERY SIBLING MAY HAVE FAILED, BUT I SHALL PREVAIL!
AND, AS MR. FANTASTIC ALLOWS HIMSELF A DISCRETE, GRIM SMILE...
A FEW BLOCKS AWAY AT TINDOLINI'S TONSORIAL PALACE...
sa Tindolini
THE INVISIBLE GIRL HAS BEEN ENCASED IN SOLIDIFIED EARTH FOR LESS THAN FIVE SECONDS WHEN...
I DID IT! BY EXPANDING MY INVISIBLE FORCE FIELD WITHIN THE DIRT, I'VE FREED MYSELF!
ONLY FOR A MOMENT, SUSAN RICHARDS, YOUR ACTIONS BUT PROLONG YOUR FINAL AGONY!
MAYBE, BUT THEY ALSO ALLOW ME BREATHING SPACE...
... BY GENERATING A FORCE-FIELD BUBBLE TO HOLD YOU BACK, AND PROPEL MYSELF INTO THE STREET!
NOW, WITHOUT THE RESTRICTIONS OF BEING INSIDE A BUILDING, I CAN USE MY POWER TO BEST ADVANTAGE.
AND, SINCE MY POWER ISN'T MUCH MORE THAN DEFENSIVE AGAINST BRUTE FORCE LIKE THIS...
... THAT MEANS FINDING SOMEONE BETTER EQUIPPED TO FIGHT THIS MONSTER...
...THE THING!
PUSHING MYSELF OUT OF THE STORE LIKE THAT WAS AN INSPIRATION!
I'VE NEVER THOUGHT TO USE MY FORCE-FIELD AS A MEANS OF TRANSPORTATION BEFORE, BUT AS LONG AS I'M CAREFUL...
16

The Fantastic Four #232, page 13 original art
by John Byrne

THE FANTASTIC FOUR
232
17
...I SHOULD BE ABLE TO TRAVEL IN MUCH THE SAME WAY THE ICE-MAN USES HIS ICE-SLIDES. *
NOW, WHAT THEATRE DID BEN SAY HE WAS TAKING ALICIA TO?
TAXI
*ICE-MAN IS A FORMER MEMBER OF THE UNCANNY X-MEN--JIM.
MEANWHILE...
I'VE HAD IT--NO MORE BREATH IN MY LUNGS--MIGHT AS WELL GIVE...
SPORTS
SUN 'N' SURF WATER SCUBA
WAIT... THAT SPORTS STORE... WITH SCUBA* GEAR!
*SELF-CONTAINED UNDERWATER BREATHING APPARATUS--JACQUES SALICRUP.
SUMMONING HIS FINAL IOTA OF STRENGTH, THE THING STAGGERS BLINDLY TOWARDS THE SPORTING GOODS SHOP...
HERE, JAN, PUT THIS TANK ON THE...
HOLEE...!
UNABLE TO SPEAK, TOO NEAR TOTALLY COLLAPSING TO COMMUNICATE BY SIGN OR GESTURE, BEN GRIMM THRASHES ABOUT THE STORE...
IT'S THE THING!
HE IS PERHAPS ONLY SECONDS FROM DEATH, AND HIS TERROR BUILDS TO NEAR TANGIBLE LEVELS...
DON! DO SOMETHING! HE'S...HE'S DROWNING!
STAFF
DROWNING...YEAH... HE'S...I MEAN... I GOTTA... GOTTA... OH, CRIPES, WHAT CAN I DO? WHAT CAN...
OH, FOR HEAVEN'S SAKE, DON! GIVE ME THAT SCUBA TANK!
SHE ACTS WITHOUT THOUGHT OF THE DANGER IN WHICH SHE PLACES HERSELF, THRUSTING THE LIFEBRINGING AIRHOSE INTO THE THING'S WATER PRISON...
HUHHHH!

The Fantastic Four #234 cover original art
by John Byrne & Terry Austin



The Fantastic Four #238, page 1 original art
by John Byrne

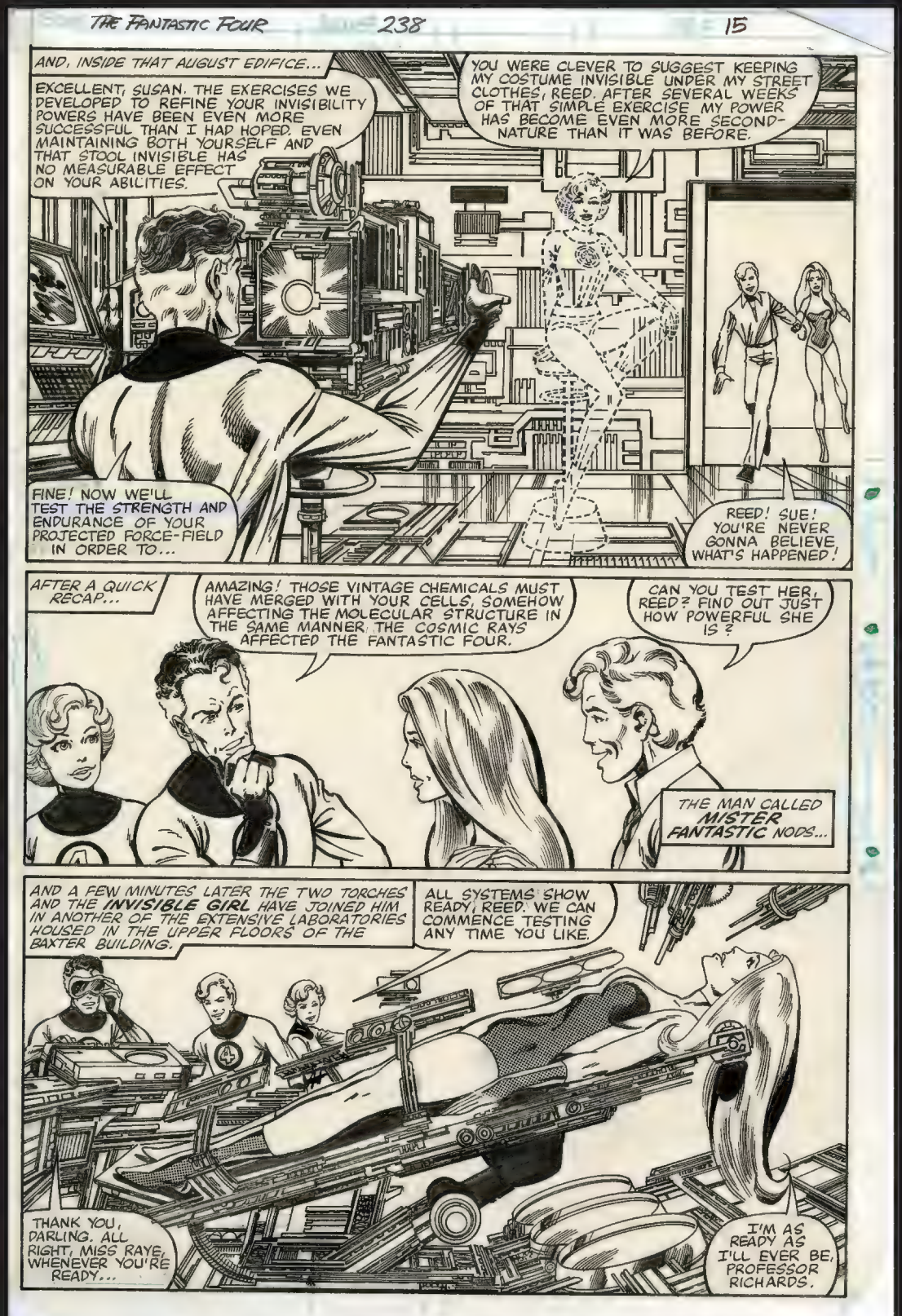
THE FANTASTIC FOUR 238
Reed Richards! Ben Grimm! Sue Richards! Johnny Storm! Together they braved the unknown terrors of outer space and were changed into something more than human! MR. FANTASTIC! THE THING! THE INVISIBLE GIRL! THE HUMAN TORCH! And now the world will never again be the same!
Stan Lee PRESENTS: THE FANTASTIC FOUR!
THE LADY IS FOR BURNING!
FIVE MINUTES AGO, JOHNNY STORM ENTERED THE APARTMENT OF HIS GIRLFRIEND FRANKIE RAYE WITH NOTHING MORE ON HIS MIND THAN APOLOGIZING FOR HIS LONG ABSENCE...*
...INSTEAD HE FOUND HIMSELF CONFRONTED WITH A DISCOVERY WHICH IS DESTINED TO CHANGE NOT ONLY HIS LIFE, BUT THOSE OF ALL THE FANTASTIC FOUR AS WELL.
DO YOU SEE IT, JOHNNY? PLEASE TELL ME YOU CAN SEE IT TOO!
I SEE IT BABE, BUT WHAT IS IT? WHAT'S IT FOR?
THAT'S JUST IT, JOHNNY! I DON'T KNOW WHAT IT'S FOR --I DON'T EVEN KNOW WHERE IT CAME FROM!
*THE HUMAN TORCH AND HIS THREE PARTNERS WERE PRISONERS OF DOCTOR DOOM.--SALICRUP.
JOHN BYRNE WORDS AND PICTURES / JIM NOVAK LETTERING / BOB SHAREN COLORING / JIM SALICRUP EDITOR / JIM SHOOTER EDITOR-IN-CHIEF

FANTASTIC FOUR® Vol. 1, No. 238, January, 1982. (U.S.P.S. 539-910) Published by MARVEL COMICS GROUP, James E. Galton, President. Stan Lee, Publisher. Michael Hobson, Vice-President, Publishing. Milton Schiffman, Vice-President, Production. OFFICE OF PUBLICATION: 575 MADISON AVENUE, NEW YORK, N.Y. 10022. Controlled Circulation postage paid at New York, NY and at additional mailing office. Published monthly. Copyright© 1981 by Marvel Comics Group, a division of Cadence Industries Corporation. All rights reserved. Price 60¢ per copy in the U.S. and Canada. Subscription rate $7.20 for 12 issues. Canada, $8.20. Foreign, $9.20. Printed in the U.S.A. No similarity between any of the names, characters, persons, and/or institutions in this magazine with those of any living or dead person or institution is intended, and any such similarity which may exist is purely coincidental. This periodical may not be sold except by authorized dealers and is sold subject to the conditions that it shall not be sold or distributed with any part of its cover or markings removed, nor in a mutilated condition. FANTASTIC FOUR (including all prominent characters featured in the issue) and the distinctive likenesses thereof, are trademarks of the MARVEL COMICS GROUP. Postmaster: Send address changes to Subscription Dept., Marvel Comics Group, 575 Madison Avenue, New York, N.Y. 10022.

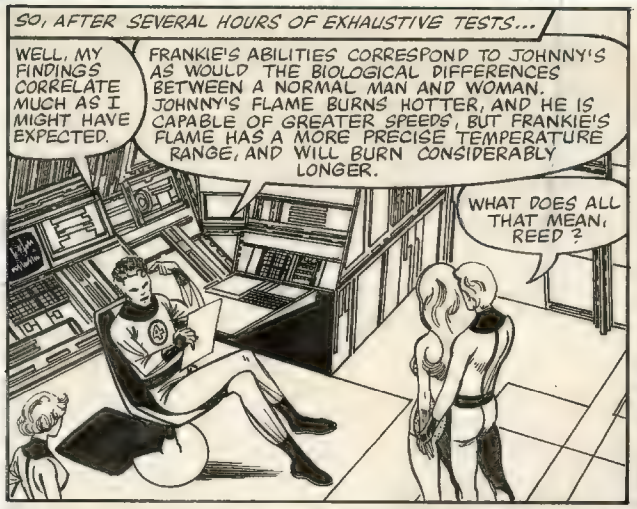
The Fantastic Four #238, page 4 original art
by John Byrne

THE FANTASTIC FOUR 238 6
FRANKIE!
I-- REMEMBER!
A SUDDEN BURST AND SWIRL OF BLINDING, BLISTERING FLAME, AND THE GIRL CALLED FRANKIE RAYE IS GONE...
...IN HER PLACE A GOLD AND CRIMSON COMET STREAKS SKYWARD, OBLIVIOUS TO THE MAN-MADE BARRIERS IN HER PATH...
AND FOR A MOMENT THE HUMAN TORCH CAN ONLY STAND DUMB-FOUNDED...
SHE-- SHE FLAMED ON!
BUT THAT'S IMPOSSIBLE! I'M THE ONLY ONE WHO CAN STILL DO THAT!
GOTTA GET AFTER HER!
BUT FIRST, GOTTA DRAW THE FLAMES OF HER FIRE-TRAIL TO ME BEFORE THEY BURN DOWN THE WHOLE BUILDING!
FLAME ON!
DID IT! GOOD THING FRANKIE HAS A TOP-FLOOR APARTMENT. AT LEAST SHE DIDN'T KILL ANY-ONE ON HER WAY OUT!
NOW-- WHERE THE HECK HAS SHE GONE?

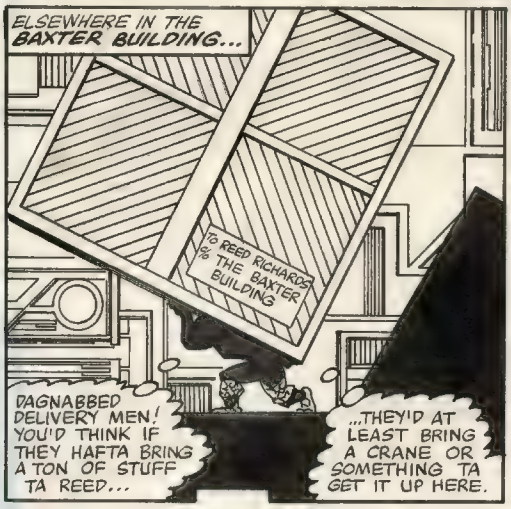
The Fantastic Four #238, page 11 original art
by John Byrne


THE FANTASTIC FOUR 238 15
AND, INSIDE THAT AUGUST EDIFICE...
EXCELLENT, SUSAN. THE EXERCISES WE DEVELOPED TO REFINE YOUR INVISIBILITY POWERS HAVE BEEN EVEN MORE SUCCESSFUL THAN I HAD HOPED. EVEN MAINTAINING BOTH YOURSELF AND THAT STOOL INVISIBLE HAS NO MEASURABLE EFFECT ON YOUR ABILITIES.
YOU WERE CLEVER TO SUGGEST KEEPING MY COSTUME INVISIBLE UNDER MY STREET CLOTHES, REED. AFTER SEVERAL WEEKS OF THAT SIMPLE EXERCISE MY POWER HAS BECOME EVEN MORE SECOND-NATURE THAN IT WAS BEFORE.
FINE! NOW WE'LL TEST THE STRENGTH AND ENDURANCE OF YOUR PROJECTED FORCE-FIELD IN ORDER TO...
REED! SUE! YOU'RE NEVER GONNA BELIEVE WHAT'S HAPPENED!
AFTER A QUICK RECAP...
AMAZING! THOSE VINTAGE CHEMICALS MUST HAVE MERGED WITH YOUR CELLS, SOMEHOW AFFECTING THE MOLECULAR STRUCTURE IN THE SAME MANNER THE COSMIC RAYS AFFECTED THE FANTASTIC FOUR.
CAN YOU TEST HER, REED? FIND OUT JUST HOW POWERFUL SHE IS?
THE MAN CALLED MISTER FANTASTIC NODS...
AND A FEW MINUTES LATER THE TWO TORCHES AND THE INVISIBLE GIRL HAVE JOINED HIM IN ANOTHER OF THE EXTENSIVE LABORATORIES HOUSED IN THE UPPER FLOORS OF THE BAXTER BUILDING.
ALL SYSTEMS SHOW READY, REED. WE CAN COMMENCE TESTING ANY TIME YOU LIKE.
THANK YOU, DARLING. ALL RIGHT, MISS RAYE, WHENEVER YOU'RE READY...
I'M AS READY AS I'LL EVER BE, PROFESSOR RICHARDS.

The Fantastic Four #238, page 12 original art
by John Byrne


SO, AFTER SEVERAL HOURS OF EXHAUSTIVE TESTS...
WELL, MY FINDINGS CORRELATE MUCH AS I MIGHT HAVE EXPECTED.
FRANKIE'S ABILITIES CORRESPOND TO JOHNNY'S AS WOULD THE BIOLOGICAL DIFFERENCES BETWEEN A NORMAL MAN AND WOMAN. JOHNNY'S FLAME BURNS HOTTER, AND HE IS CAPABLE OF GREATER SPEEDS, BUT FRANKIE'S FLAME HAS A MORE PRECISE TEMPERATURE RANGE, AND WILL BURN CONSIDERABLY LONGER.
WHAT DOES ALL THAT MEAN, REED?

I WOULD SAY, IF FRANKIE IS INTERESTED, THAT AFTER A SUITABLE PERIOD OF TRAINING, WE MAY BE CALLING OUR FRIENDS AT MARVEL COMICS AND TELLING THEM TO START PUBLISHING THE FANTASTIC FIVE!
YAY-BOY!


ELSEWHERE IN THE BAXTER BUILDING...
TO REED RICHARDS % THE BAXTER BUILDING
DAGNABBED DELIVERY MEN! YOU'D THINK IF THEY HAFTA BRING A TON OF STUFF TA REED...
...THEY'D AT LEAST BRING A CRANE OR SOMETHING TA GET IT UP HERE.

BUT NOOOO. I CAN JUST HEAR 'EM: "THEY DON'T NEED NO CRANES OR NOTHIN'. THEY GOT THE THING."
WELL, MAMA GRIMM DIDN'T RAISE HER BOY BENJAMIN TA BE NOBODY'S WORK-HORSE... EVEN IF I CAN CARRY A TON WITHOUT WORKIN' UP A SWEAT.
AH, WELL--NOW THAT THAT'S DONE I WONDER IF THE OTHERS ARE UP FER A PIZZA OR TWENTY...

The Fantastic Four #240 cover original art
by John Byrne & Terry Austin

TITLE FANTASTIC FOUR SCHEDULE
NO. 240
MONTH MAR ARTIST BYRNE/AUSTIN

6 3/4 X 10 1/2

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Amazing Heroes #1 (June 1981) cover, an homage to *The Fantastic Four* #1 by John Byrne

The Fantastic Four Chronicles pinup by John Byrne featuring the characters introduced in *Fantastic Four* by Stan Lee & Jack Kirby.

In 1984, the piece was revised with costume tweaks and additional characters added for release as a *Marvel Press* poster.

The Fantastic Four Chronicles (February 1982) cover
by John Byrne

Marvel Super-Heroes Megazine #1 (October 1994) cover
by Darick Robertson, Mark Farmer & Jung Choi

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IRON MAN BETRAYED TO THE FEARSOME ANI-MEN!
THE HULK ATTACKED BY HIS GREATEST FOES!
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Reprinting *The Fantastic Four* #232 & *Special Edition* #1, *Daredevil* #159, *The Invincible Iron Man* #115 and *The Incredible Hulk* #314

Marvel Super-Heroes Megazine #2 (November 1994) cover
by Frank Miller & Jung Choi

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Reprinting *The Fantastic Four* #233, *Daredevil* #160, *The Invincible Iron Man* #116 and *The Incredible Hulk* #315

Marvel Super-Heroes Megazine #3 (December 1994) cover
by Michael Golden & Jung Choi

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Reprinting *The Fantastic Four* #234, *Daredevil* #161, *The Invincible Iron Man* #117 and *The Incredible Hulk* #316

Marvel Super-Heroes Megazine #4 (January 1995) cover
by Lee Weeks & Jung Choi

Reprinting *The Fantastic Four* #235, *Daredevil* #163, *The Invincible Iron Man* #159 and *The Incredible Hulk* #317

Marvel Super-Heroes Megazine #5 (February 1995) cover
by John Byrne & Jung Choi

Reprinting *The Fantastic Four* #236, *The Incredible Hulk* #318 and *Marvel Two-In-One* #50

Marvel Super-Heroes Megazine #6 (March 1995) cover
by Scott McDaniel & Jung Choi

Reprinting *The Fantastic Four* #237, *Daredevil* #164, *The Invincible Iron Man* #47 and *The Incredible Hulk* #319

Fantastic Four Visionaries: John Byrne Vol. 1 (2001) cover
by John Byrne & Chris Dickey

Reprinting *The Fantastic Four* #232-240

Fantastic Four Visionaries: John Byrne Vol. 1 Second Edition (2009) cover
by John Byrne, Terry Austin & John Kalisz

Reprinting *The Fantastic Four* #232-240

BIOGRAPHIES

JOHN BYRNE

With his naturalistic style captivating legions of fans, John Byrne became one of the most influential and popular comic artists of the '70s and '80s. Born in England but raised in Canada, with four years of art school training under his belt, Byrne headed straight for the comics business, getting his start with Charlton Comics.

He produced his first original creations, the robot Rog-2000—which appeared as a backup strip in *E-Man*—and *Doomsday +1* at Charlton. Though the art was rough compared to his later standards, it drew the attention of Marvel Comics, where he found work on *Champions*, *Iron Fist* and *Marvel Team-Up*. The relationship he established on these books with writer Chris Claremont led to his entry on a title that was rapidly ascending in importance at Marvel: the "All-New, All-Different" *X-Men*.

Taking the torch from Dave Cockrum, for the next five years Byrne penciled and co-plotted the adventures of Marvel's mutants. His fresh style translated perfectly to the new cast of characters, and together Byrne and Claremont built the X-Men into a keystone title at Marvel. However, just after the twin triumphs of "The Dark Phoenix Saga" and "Days of Future Past," Byrne left the book.

His next major achievement was a long run as writer/artist on *Fantastic Four* that restored the title to its imaginative best. His run hearkened back to the glory days of Lee and Kirby and is arguably the milestone achievement of his career. Other high points in his early '80s Marvel work included "War and Remembrance," a bracing set of Captain America stories with Roger Stern and *Alpha Flight*, a team of Canadian heroes written and drawn by Byrne.

Next, Byrne headed to DC Comics to revive the flagging Superman franchise with a reset of the Superman mythos that was enormously popular at the time and is still hailed as a masterpiece decades later. After two years helming Superman, Byrne returned to Marvel to work on a diverse set of books including the New Universe's *Star Brand*, the irreverent *Sensational She-Hulk* and the high-tech adventures of Iron Man. In the 1990s, Byrne launched his creator-owned series *Next Men*, scripted the first issues of Mike Mignola's *Hellboy* and delivered the goods for both Marvel and DC on numerous titles. Today, the implacable Byrne continues to write, draw and preside over a popular website. He was inducted into the Eisner Hall of Fame in 2015.

STEVE DITKO

The incomparable Steve Ditko began his career in comics in the 1950s, drawing for Charlton Comics and some of the usual science fiction, horror and mystery titles of the era. His style, however, was anything but "the usual," and it would prove to be as instantly recognizable as some of the iconic characters he would later introduce. His clean and lean figure work somehow took on a life singularly its own, often springing idiosyncratically across the page, channeling the kind of comic art energy that few others dared to attempt.

Born in Pennsylvania in 1927, Ditko studied illustration under Jerry Robinson at the Cartoonists and Illustrators School in New York. In 1953, he embarked on his career in comic storytelling by penciling odd, otherworldly tales in books like Charlton's *Space Adventures* and *Strange Suspense Stories*. His reputation grew as a draftsman who mixed powerfully evocative images into otherwise standard comics fare.

Recruited to join Stan Lee's small stable of artists in 1958, Steve's nuances were a noticeable contrast to Jack Kirby's boldness, and together they acted as the line's prime artistic movers. New titles like *Tales to Astonish* and *Tales of Suspense* joined overhauled series like *Journey Into Mystery* and *Strange Tales*, with Steve's eerie, *Twilight Zone*-tinged stories adding a hint of ominous paranoia to the texture of those anthologies. His style was so one-of-a-kind that he eventually got a book to call completely his own: In 1961, *Amazing Adventures* was retitled *Amazing Adult Fantasy* and given over completely to Ditko and Lee's collaborations.

But it was a certain wall-crawler who premiered later the next June that would confirm Steve Ditko's place in comics history. In 1962, in the pages of *Amazing Fantasy*, he and Stan Lee brought to life Peter Parker, the Amazing Spider-Man. The troubled teen hero proved so popular that he was given his own series, the first 38 issues of which are ensconced as one of the all-time great runs in comics history. Another Ditko character, Dr. Strange, was an incredible influence on artists for years to come, with Ditko's mind-bending delineations of the Master of the Mystic Arts setting all kinds of (unintended) standards for pop art psychedelia.

Leaving Marvel Comics in 1966, he worked for Charlton again, drawing titles like *Captain Atom* and *Blue Beetle*. In the '70s, he worked for DC, launching *Shade, the Changing Man*, and independently published tales of his character, Mr. A, who exemplified Ditko's firm belief in Ayn Randian Objectivism. In the latter part of his career, he returned to Marvel, working there in the late '70s and throughout the '80s. Ditko was inducted into the Eisner Hall of Fame in 1994 and continued to add to his prolific body of work through self-publishing until his death in June 2018.

ED HANNIGAN

Ed Hannigan worked in comics for over two decades, during which time he established himself as a writer, penciler and popular cover artist. In the early 1970s, Hannigan landed a position in Sol Brodsky's production office at Marvel where he learned every part of the comics trade. Soon, the young artist was given a chance to draw covers for the Marvel UK *Planet of the Apes* magazine, which led to interior art on a new *Apes* story written by Doug Moench and cover art on some of Marvel's mainline color comics. His first regular gig was a five-month stint drawing *Kull the Conqueror*. In 1978, he was drafted onto *The Defenders* as penciler, though a year later Hannigan would perform the unusual switch from artist to writer on the title. He would write Marvel's "non-team" for two years with highlights including the "Xenogenesis" and "Tunnelworld" sagas. Other writing credits for Hannigan during this time included a Tigra story in *Marvel Premiere*, *Power Man* and *Black Panther*, where he undertook the noble effort of finishing storylines begun by Jack Kirby and Don McGregor. After scribing *Fantastic Four Annual* #16 drawn by the legendary Steve Ditko, Hannigan began penciling *The Spectacular Spider-Man*. It was here that Hannigan's Eisner-influenced layouts combined with Bill Mantlo's scripts for an influential run that included the debut of Cloak and Dagger. His final work with Marvel was *Amazing Spider-Man Annual* #17, after which he crossed town to draw for DC. There, he launched a new *Green Arrow* series with Mike Grell and *Batman: Legends of the Dark Knight* with Dennis O'Neil. In 1992, Hannigan wrote and illustrated his own concept, *Skull & Bones*, and followed that up with a four-part Catwoman story in *Showcase '93*. In 1996, Hannigan left comics to take up a new career as a graphic designer.

FRED HEMBECK

Born in New York City in 1953, Fred Hembeck was raised in the small town of Yaphank on Long Island. An adolescent interest in drawing overlapped with his discovery of comic books, and his destiny was forged. Hembeck attended State University of New York at Farmingdale and studied art and design. In the late '70s, his attempts to break into mainstream comics were rebuffed, but that didn't stop him from reading his favorite titles and writing letters to the editor in the form of his already distinctive cartoons. *Iron Man* writer Bill Mantlo so enjoyed one of those cartoon missives that he had it printed in the letter column of *Iron Man* #112. Hembeck got paid $35 for his work and a career was born.

His parodies began appearing in the industry periodical *Comic Buyer's Guide*, often guest-starring himself as the irreverent "Cartoon Fred" reporter interviewing the super heroes. FantaCo and Eclipse began to publish collections of his work, and it wasn't long before Hembeck latched on to high-profile work with Marvel: *Fantastic Four Roast*, which celebrated the 20th anniversary of Marvel's First Family; *Spectacular Spider-Man* #86, a full-length story for Assistant Editor's Month drawn in Hembeck's inimitable cartoon style; and a regular strip in the monthly promotional magazine *Marvel Age*. At the end of the decade, he would write and draw the *Fred Hembeck Destroys the Marvel Universe*. Hembeck's cartooning would make him arguably the most beloved super hero comics parodist ever, a legacy he enjoys to this day.

JACK KIRBY

Jacob Kurtzberg was born in 1917 and grew up in New York's gritty Lower East Side. It would be many years before he would adopt the name Jack Kirby, but his experiences in the neighborhood would help inform the work that later made him a legend. Unlike many of his rough-and-tumble peers, his imagination inspired him to look beyond the commonality of everyday life. He was inclined at an early age to pursue drawing, and he was also a guy who wanted to "get things done." This hard work ethic and ambition took him places most men of humble stations would never dream of going.

After early strip work helped get his name out to employers, a fateful meeting with artist Joe Simon connected the two at the hip and vaulted both of them into comics prominence. Together, they developed Captain America for Timely Comics, and Kirby immediately helped redefine what comics could be with his innovative page designs and proportion-exploding panels.

Soon, Simon and Kirby were working at National/DC, turning out hit kid-gang comics like *Newsboy Legion* and *Boy Commandos*, as well as super-hero fare like Sandman and Manhunter. He served honorably in World War II, with combat duties that took him through the European theater.

After the war, Simon and Kirby established the romance genre with *Young Romance*, produced titles including *Boy's Ranch*, *Black Magic* and *Fighting American*, and started their own imprint, Mainline. Kirby followed with *Challengers of the Unknown*, Green Arrow and the strip *Sky Masters of the Space Force*. By 1958, he began a prolific output at Atlas/Marvel that covered Western, war and monster genres. When it came time to launch the Marvel Age of Comics, Kirby brought his dynamic layouts, unparalleled action and unbridled creativity to the fore in books like *Fantastic Four*, *Avengers*, *X-Men*, *Incredible Hulk* and *Thor*, leaving his unmistakable stamp on the characters.

Through it all, he earned the nickname "The King," and his way of doing things became so popular that it set the tone throughout the '60s; before they were entrusted with taking over completely, new artists were often assimilated on to books by working over Kirby's layouts. Kirby left Marvel for DC in 1970, this time handling scripting chores as well as art duties. His "Fourth World" books, along with *Kamandi*, *OMAC* and *The Demon*, were just a few of the highlights of his tenure at DC before returning to Marvel in the late '70s to lend his imagination to *The Eternals*, *Devil Dinosaur* and *Machine Man*.

He also returned to the pages of *Captain America*, the character he had first made famous 35 years previously.

Kirby was inducted into the Eisner Hall of Fame's 1987 inaugural class and continued creating comics throughout the '90s until passing away in 1994, a creative giant for whom the word "legend" may be too small a title.

STAN LEE

Stanley Lieber was born in New York City in 1922, the oldest son of Jewish immigrants from Romania. Upon an early graduation from high school, Stan was thrust in to the Depression-era economy. Meanwhile, Martin Goodman's Timely Comics needed staff, and Stan, Goodman's wife's cousin, joined as an assistant editor. His youthful aspiration was to one day write the "Great American Novel," so for his comic book work he adopted a pseudonym: Stan Lee. This way, he could reserve his real name for that novel-to-be.

He quickly graduated from simple text pieces to full-length stories, and before long his proficiency on the job earned him the position of managing editor while still a teenager. His tenure in the '50s saw the company's expansion (under the name Atlas) to include horror, crime, Western, war, satire and romance comics.

All this was a prelude to the Marvel Age of Comics, ushered in under the auspices of Stan Lee and a small stable of artists including the formidably talented Jack Kirby and Steve Ditko. Responding to Martin Goodman's challenge to find a way to revitalize dwindling sales, Lee figured he would co-opt the super-hero revival at DC Comics and add his own magic to the mix: Instead of being perfect invulnerable champions, Marvel's heroes would be normal, fallible, imperfect people forced to cope with their newfound superhuman traits just as the average person might.

Lee's innovation sent shock waves throughout comics, and within a few years, Marvelmania was taking hold. Under his direction, the Fantastic Four, Spider-Man, Iron Man, Thor, Doctor Strange and the Incredible Hulk flourished in the shared universe they inhabited. Lee developed the idea that these larger-than-life heroes would meet each other in crossovers from title to title, thus broadening the story possibilities for eager fans.

In addition to bringing a new twist to the life of the super hero, Lee also brought the reader inside Marvel's "Batty Bullpen," creating a sense of camaraderie and special membership. His friendly and enthusiastic banter in letters pages, house ads and Bullpen Bulletins brought Marvel Comics to a level of familiarity with their fans that had kids and college students proudly professing themselves to be "True Believers."

At one time, Lee wrote virtually every comic that Marvel published during the '60s. But when he was promoted to publisher in 1971, his writing had to take a backseat, and by the mid-'70s, he semi-retired from scripting duties. Over the years, Lee has returned to write scripts for the occasional single issue or series, focusing on Marvel's ventures into television and movie development. His standing in the field was recognized with his induction into the Eisner Hall of Fame in 1994. He remained Marvel Comics' single greatest ambassador to the world until his passing in 2018.

JIM SHOOTER

Writer/artist/editor/publisher Jim Shooter broke into comics as a precocious 13-year-old after submitting a batch of Legion of Super-Heroes pages he had written and drawn. Impressed by what was going on at Marvel, the teenager brought his "Marvel-style" attitude to bear on Legion, rolling off a three-year run that concluded in 1969. During this time, he introduced several memorable Legionnaires and villains and also wrote several stories in *Superman*.

After a five-year break from comics, Shooter returned to the scene, freelancing for both Marvel and DC. He retook the reins of Legion in *Superboy*, and wrote various Marvel titles, which led to a staff position at Marvel in 1976 and a memorable run on *Avengers*. After two years, he succeeded Archie Goodwin as Marvel's editor in chief. In his view, Marvel at that time was in editorial chaos, not capitalizing on its full potential. Only 27 years old, Shooter forced his will over all aspects of the publishing regime, establishing an incentive system for creators, streamlining the publishing schedule and enforcing his own high editorial standards on all the books. He continued Marvel's success with licensed titles *G.I. Joe* and *Transformers* and the Epic line of creator-owned comics. Creative efforts included writing *Secret Wars* and its sequel, and building the New Universe and writing its flagship title, *Starbrand*.

Forced out of the company in 1987, a bid by Shooter to buy Marvel failed. He then formed a group to start his own company, Valiant, which produced licensed and original comics to great acclaim in the early '90s. Despite Valiant's success, Shooter's tenure there was ended after losing control of the corporation. Short-lived imprints Defiant and Broadway Comics followed but were victims of the mid-'90s industry bust. Since then, Shooter has returned to DC to write a 13-issue run of *Legion*, and overseen a revival of Gold Key characters Magnus, Doctor Solar and Turok for Dark Horse.

Biographies researched and written by John Rhett Thomas

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THE GOLDEN AGE

As the Great Depression wore on and the specter of war hung over America, a new storytelling medium was born: the comic book. Within their four-color pages, larger-than-life super heroes could make short work of America's foes, giving readers of all ages hope for victory against the real-life enemies that faced the United States. At the forefront of this new medium was Timely Comics, a young company staffed by such legendary creators as Carl Burgos, Bill Everett, Joe Simon, Jack Kirby and Stan Lee. These trailblazing talents birthed a vast array of characters that would give rise to the Marvel Universe!

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THE ATLAS ERA

Seeing super heroes waning, Timely Comics evolved into Atlas Comics and took on a vast new range of genres: science-fiction tales of outer space adventures; realistic war comics; buxom jungle heroines; horror comics that would become the center of a moral panic that rocked the industry; and romance comics for the emerging teen audience. Even the classic costumed heroes of the Golden Age retooled to take on the threat of Communism. From Western gunfighters to crime to horror, the Atlas Era had it all!

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ATLAS ERA STRANGE TALES VOLS. 1-6
ATLAS ERA TALES TO ASTONISH VOLS. 1-4
ATLAS ERA TALES OF SUSPENSE VOLS. 1-4
ATLAS ERA VENUS VOL. 1

THE MARVEL AGE

In August 1961, change hit newsstands: *The Fantastic Four* #1 did not feature the squeaky-clean heroes of yesteryear. They were real characters placed in extraordinary circumstances. They lived together, they fought among themselves — and sometimes, they even lost to the bad guys. This was more than a change in attitude: It was the beginning of something entirely different — the beginning of the Marvel Age of Comics!

Thanks to the fertile imaginations of Stan Lee, Jack Kirby, Steve Ditko and others, an unending list of heroes followed the FF with ever-increasing acclaim and popularity: the Amazing Spider-Man, the Mighty Thor, the Incredible Hulk, Daredevil, Iron Man and the X-Men, to name but a few. These were the Marvel heroes, born of conflict and a continuous struggle to balance human lives with superhuman responsibilities.

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NICK FURY, AGENT OF S.H.I.E.L.D. VOLS. 1-3
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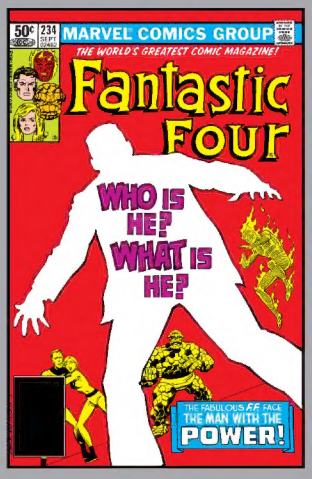

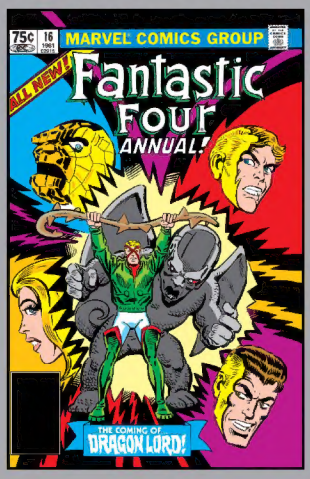

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